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GRISELDA.

A NOVEL.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF "THE GARDEN OF EDEN,"

ETC., ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

LONDON : F. V. WHITE & CO.,
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GRISELDA.



CHAPTER I.



IT was a glorious morning in Goarshausen. Griselda awoke, wondering where she was. When she remembered, she went to the window. Beyond the garden, with its clumps of acacias and laurels, the Rhine rippled placidly. To the left, to the right, were those round-backed hills, all variegated and changing tints,

from the palest green to the deepest violet, as the morning sunbeams or the flitting shadows touched them.

One minute of wondering admiration, then her thoughts fled to facts. She rang her bell, and sent a scribbled message by the chambermaid to Hugh.

‘How is he? Are we to breakfast together?’

While she was brushing and plaiting her fair locks, a pencilled message was brought back,—

‘He has passed a most tranquil night, and seems almost himself. At the same time, we must be strictly on guard. We had better breakfast in the garden, in about a half-an-hour from this. I trust in you to remember that our talk must exclude any and all reference to disturbing events.

H. B.’

Griselda felt relief,—peace. She put on her prettiest dress. This was a green-spotted muslin, trimmed with lace. With her fair rose-tinted skin, she looked a sweet siren,—even as the siren of the dangerous Lorelei hard by might have looked, could she have been dressed in modern costume.

Going down, she saw her father leaning on Hugh's arm, just reaching the bottom of the staircase. 'Dear good fellow that Hugh is!' she gratefully thought, with moistened eyes. 'I don't mind showing him my letters'—she had them in her pocket—'one bit. And, if he does not like them, they shall not go.'

However, when Hugh, after their pleasant little out - of - door breakfast, asked Griselda apart whether she had

accomplished her correspondence, and she, in mute reply, handed him the three letters, she greatly doubted whether those specimens of her literary 'incompetence'—she called it—would ever be sent to England.

Sitting by her father on a bench under the waving acacias, she watched Hugh pace the narrow garden walks reading her letters. He walked slowly to the end of one path, then stood still, carefully fastening the thin envelopes. Then she felt an instinct to jump up and run after him—he was stamping them. Then, worse than all, he went to the post-box that belonged to the hotel, and dropped them in, without any further ceremony.

He returned to them, and began ordinary talk with Mr Black. She did

not dare to remark upon her letters, lest her father should remember and grow furious again. So she sat and quietly endured her misgivings, while the Vicar, who was growing steadily better, told them stories of the Rhine,—how the fortress on Rheinfels opposite them had bravely held out against General Tallard and his twenty-four thousand Frenchman in 1692,—how Tallard had gone to his king previously, and had boastfully capped the boastful speeches of other courtiers by saying, ‘My new-year’s offering to your Majesty shall be the fortress of Rheinfels,’—how the famous whirlpool beneath the Lorelei rock lay hard by; and how many had been drawn to destruction while gazing at the supposed vision of the maiden and listening to the mystical

songs that were presumably uttered by her lips.

Here the Vicar sighed.

‘It would seem that each one of us had our special Lorelei,’ he said dreamily. ‘We are lured and lured on, only to find ourselves vainly struggling in a whirlpool.’

His two young companions exerted themselves to change the current of his thoughts. They pretended to disagree as to whom should walk, and whether Mr Black could accompany them in the pony-chair belonging to the hotel. Their squabble ended by Hugh going off seemingly in a huff with Griselda, and after whispering to her aside, ‘Talk about anything but his affairs. I will come back and mount guard in an hour or two. Then you can go.

Isn't that the best way?' Griselda nodded significantly, then turned round to her father, with a vexed expression.

'Don't be angry with poor Hugh,' he said, taking her arm, and walking feebly towards the river bank.

Griselda protested that she was not angry, but managed to say rather sharply that she did not like 'prigs' and 'dictatorial people.'

'But you two were such good friends till I got ill,' said John Black, in mild expostulation. 'Sometimes I almost thought—but that doesn't matter.'

She flushed up. She knew very well what her father meant.

'Griselda,' he began again, 'I have often wondered what you—would do—if I died? Tom and Harry are good fellows, I believe; but I have always

fancied that your organisation was superior to theirs,—that you would not be happy making your home with them.’

‘Don’t talk of things which are not likely to happen,’ said his daughter, fondly pressing his arm. ‘You are not likely to die, father.’

‘But if I were to die soon—answer me, Griselda—do you care for any one person more than another?’

Had his brain been in good working order, he would scarcely have talked thus. His speech took Griselda entirely by surprise.

‘Oh dear, no!’ she cried, her face aflame. ‘You, and the boys, and Jemima, of course, I love you all; but I only like other people.’

Then she stopped short, drew his attention to a vineyard on the opposite

bank, and chattered on till, when Hugh came back, she was almost at the end of her conversational resources.

They had luncheon together, then Hugh showed Griselda the map of the excursions in the neighbourhood that hung in the hall.

‘If you take my advice, you will stroll towards the Swiss Valley,’ he said. ‘You have four hours before dinner, and you will see something of the scenery, at all events. By-the-way, dear,’ he added, looking with fond admiration into her eyes, ‘those letters were admirable,—capital! I don’t mean that they were fine specimens of composition or caligraphy; but they were just what was wanted at this point.’

Griselda looked almost distressed. At no time did she like praise. And

Hugh's kind manner cut her to the quick, she could not tell why. She left him hastily, and hurriedly began her walk.

At first this lay among the grey pebbles of dry watercourses, or along goat-paths at the edges of the crags. The ground steadily rose, and presently she found herself on a hill. Behind her, tiers of hills, until the highest were actual mountains faintly wreathed in pale mist ; beneath her, the gleaming Rhine, with the ruin-crowned gloomy hill, the Rheinfels ; and all around was silence, in which the goat-bells were distinctly heard tinkling here, there, above, to the right and to the left.

She paused, delighting in the luxurious silence ; then she followed the path through a young forest of delicate larches.

She did not know which way she was

going, for the footpath wound from left to right fantastically. She only knew she was steadily ascending, and that after at least half-an-hour's carefully stepping aside from old trunks that lay about and across the path like bundles of petrified snakes, and after manfully making her way through twisted boughs that showered their tiny green needles plentifully upon her as she passed, she came to the top of the wooded hill.

It was a green, fern-clad, circular clearing. Great trunks of trees lay here and there, green moss and fragile lichen clinging to their peeling bark, ferns and tender weeds springing up about them from the fragrant earth.

The grassy knoll was deserted. There were no footprints in the soft turf. With a species of joy, Griselda felt that her kind

—those odd creatures, as she thought them, ordinary men and women—did not generally deign to haunt this beautiful spot.

It was the first time she had been alone for so long ; yet no one loved solitude better than Griselda. She had been taught to love it in that curious childhood when her mother was a confirmed invalid, her father seldom at home, her brothers cruel with the natural unchid cruelty of boys running wild. That life among them was a dull, sad solitude.

This solitude in this green ferny spot, encircled by tender beautiful trees, with God's blue heaven above, and nothing to suggest wrong-doing, or suffering, or suspense, or savagery anywhere—this solitude was heavenly.

She sat on an old trunk carefully, that

not one frail weed should be disturbed ; then she began to think.

She felt grateful that her father had recovered so far,—that those letters were safely despatched. But she felt uneasy about Hugh.

She was but sixteen, and no man had as yet dared to speak to her of love. But, when Hugh looked so tenderly into her eyes to-day, she had felt a certain sensation of dismay.

What this was, or why she felt it, she could not have told. But what did her father really mean when he asked her whether she ‘cared for any one person more than another?’

Surely—he could not think—that she could ever—marry—Hugh?

She felt ashamed of having even thought of such a thing, and began thinking of her

brothers. They had never, at any time, been particularly kind to herself and Jemima. But she had no doubt they would get better as time went on.

While she was consoling herself with this thought, she saw a man come leisurely out of the wood opposite—a grey figure.

‘Hal!’

The joyous cry was hardly out of her lips before he was bounding towards her over fallen trunks.

‘Griselda!’

Their hands were clasped. They could almost hear each other’s hearts beat.

Griselda’s lips quivered, her eyes were wet, she hardly knew whether she was sorry or glad, laughing or crying—and he?—oh, when he arrived at Goarshausen and found out all about them, and that he had been terrified about the Vicar without

much reasonable cause, when one written line—even one message left for him—would have spared him the pain—he had been in a rage with this sweet, trembling, little beauty!

‘Oh, you wretched little minx!’ he said, devouring her with his eyes; ‘you—worse than horrible little mortal!’

And he closed his hands warmly, tightly round her slim wrists. She, feeling, knowing that this was lover’s passion, shrank almost with fear for what he would do next.

He felt one fierce desire to take her in his arms there and then, and tell her that, from the first moment he saw her again in the old cathedral, he had known that she was his love, the mistress of his thoughts, and the dictator of his life and fortunes, and that no one should come between

them—neither her father nor his parents—that, if she were not eventually his wife, then, as he had been restlessly repeating to himself during his journey in pursuit, in the words of an old rhyme, ‘He’d know the reason why.’

But such rough and ready wooing might frighten this simple maiden, though she was daring as well as timid.

‘Why did you not write?’

‘Oh, I couldn’t! It was such a scene—poor father!’

I know all about it; ‘I heard at the hotel here. But he is all right now. Men of his age do get brain fits like that when they are overworked. He ought not to overwork. But we’ll talk about him presently. We’ve got ourselves to think about now. Oh, Griselda, if you were only half a quarter as kind to me as you are to other people!’

‘What have I done?’

‘Leaving me—running away like that—surely—you must know what I felt! Have you forgotten that, long ago, you promised to—’

‘Hal! Loose my hands! That was silly nonsense; we were children.’

‘All the more reason that we meant what we said; children and fools speak the truth, they say,’ said Hal, encouraged by the flood of crimson that rushed to Griselda’s face, ears, neck. ‘I spoke the truth as a child then. I may be going to speak it as a fool now; but I’ll speak it, all the same. Come here, Griselda!’ Still holding her hands, he led her back to the mossy trunk under a tree from which she had sprung up to meet him. ‘Sit down. No, not so far away. I am going to be masterful, and I am going to catechise

you. First of all, what made you tremble and half cry when you saw me ?’

‘ You startled me.’

Griselda collected herself, and prepared to be on the defensive.

‘ Unpleasantly ?’

‘ How can I tell ?’

‘ Come ’—Hal tried to see her face, which she steadily turned from him,—
‘ Griselda, you must answer me one question—straight out. Do you hate me ?’

‘ Certainly not.’

‘ Are you indifferent to me ?’

A moment’s pause ; then a feeble ‘ No.’

‘ Then there is only one thing left, Griselda. If you do not hate me, and are not indifferent to me, you must’—he drew a deep breath before he took the plunge—‘ you must feel just a little towards me as I feel towards you.’

Griselda said nothing, but tried gently to withdraw her hands.

‘Don’t you want to know what I feel for you?’

‘Perhaps—most likely you do not know yourself!’ Griselda said.

She felt danger. This young lover suddenly appearing and pouncing upon her out of the bushes in tigerish fashion was unnerving.

‘It is so many years since we met; I have only seen you now and then; you don’t even know me; how can you?’ It was but a poor, stumbling apology for a speech. But Griselda felt she must say something. ‘Oh, do be sensible! Are you all here? Your mother and father and sisters, I mean.’

‘All,’ said Hal contemptuously. ‘Ah, Griselda, you have a great deal to answer

for. When I went to your inn next day, the landlord told me to “get out”—simply that; something had happened to your father—but what? I felt frenzied. I actually went to the heads of the *Polizei*, fearing those “Weisse Rose” people had misbehaved in some way, then an interpreter explained, and I looked a fool, and the *Polizei* frowned disgustedly at me as a warning not to trifle with their dignity again. Then I got into a rage, and quarrelled with my mother and the courier, and made my sister cry, and Sir Hubert thoroughly uncomfortable; and then a lucky inspiration brought me here.’

‘How—curious!’

‘Well, not altogether so, for one of the only speeches that surly Blunt chose to honour me with that day we all met

in the cathedral was, whether I did not think St Goar a good place to stop at. I remembered that, and went to St Goar. I inquired at the hotels; you were not there. Someone suggested you might be at Goarshausen! I took the ferry across, and found you. I saw Blunt and your father in the distance sitting in the garden. I got hold of one of the waiters, and found out which way you had gone, and here I am, Griselda! If you won't tell me what you feel for me, I don't care, I will tell you what I feel for you. I don't say I have pined for you since we said good-bye, and I gave you my chain, years ago. Boys don't pine, or, if they do, they are not worthy to be called boys at all. But, whenever I did see you while we were both growing up, all that love I had for you came back

and did not leave me again ; each time it grew stronger. Then, when I came upon you, so beautiful, so simple, so good, standing at that altar, all the feeling that had smouldered these long years seemed to burst into a flame ; I wonder I did not go down on my knees to you there and then. Oh, don't snatch away your hands ! You have been taught to think, perhaps, that nothing sudden can last ; perhaps the thing itself does not last, but its effects are for ever. Is not the sudden the most powerful ? Think of electricity, of volcanic explosion.'

' Hal—pray—please ! '

' I will have my say out ! ' said the impetuous young man, emboldened by Griselda's pallor, and feeling all the keen pleasure of subjugation. ' I have been a fool to let my mother keep us apart

so long, for I believe it is she who has done it; but I will be a fool no longer in that regard. I shall be of age directly, and my own master; now I am my own master so far that I dare tell you that I love you.'

Griselda sprang up and away from him.

'Hal!' she cried, with a sudden outburst which astonished even herself, turning her glistening eyes full upon him. 'Oh, Hal, do not break my heart! You have been a sort of king to me for all these years, but getting farther and farther away. I never thought to hear you talk to me like you do; I never dreamt it could happen. Don't come off your throne and put your sceptre on my poor neck and take me up to share it with you for a while, and then cast me off!'

‘My darling!’ Hal was down on his knees before her on the grass. Sitting there, pleading, her lovely face lit up with a passion new to Griselda, she seemed to him divine, and he honestly believed that from that moment no other woman could, would, or should have any beauty in his eyes. ‘I ever let you go when I have once got you? You, my ideal, ever since I first saw you sitting there, so pretty and patient, in the orchard at Crowsfoot! I let you go? Not very likely! Does a man let a big diamond go when he succeeds in getting it? Don’t—don’t look at me like that, as if you cannot believe a word I say! Shall I swear—promise—vow—’

‘No, no! Oh, Hal, it makes me so happy; but how can I believe you? Think of what I am and what you are!’

We are poor, and, I fear, almost in disgrace because of that book my father wrote ; and you—you will be Sir Henry Romaine and very rich, with Feather's Court, and the town-house, and a lot of other places. Then your father and mother—what would they say ? Oh, it is impossible—impossible ! Let me go, Hal, dearest Hal, now, once and for all, and let us forget this—this folly !'

' You forget, Griselda ; I promised your mother—'

Griselda hid her face and sobbed. It was hard—oh, so hard ! This great prize to be laid at her feet — this young man whom she knew now to have been her most fondly, though secretly, loved hero, to be pleading and insisting at her feet—and she must turn away and resist—she must dare to say no word but a strong, firm ' No.'

But she could not say it. Hal took her in his arms and kissed her—kissed her with that first kiss of love so holy, so pure, that it rises above and kills all other emotion.

‘You are mine now,’ he said—‘mine, Griselda, for ever. Look at me, and say, “Yes.”’

She raised her head and looked straight into his eyes with an earnest, wistful look.

‘I am yours as far as this,’ she said—‘you will do as you please, take me or leave me. But I—I will never marry anyone but you. I am bound, but you are free!’

‘We were both bound, long ago,’ said Hal, ‘since that day when you gave me this.’

He took a worn little leathern purse from his breast-pocket, and showed her

that little sprig of musk she gave him years ago, when they parted at her mother's grave. He might not have thought of his little love for many months sometimes. He had had his escapades, like other young men with plenty of money to fling about, and great expectations in the future. But he had kept that as superstitiously as a heathen keeps some hideous little idol.

And Griselda confessed that she had Hal's chain locked up in three differently-sized boxes, from which it came out on great occasions.

As they left the hill-top and went slowly down the narrow overhung path into the valley, Hal, as he carefully guided Griselda's footsteps over the gnarled tree-trunks, feeling a thrill in his first hot young love when her little

hand lightly rested on his arm or his shoulder, disclosed his brilliant plans—plans as bright and cloudless as the grand sunset sky which turned the noble Rhine into a blood-red river and gleamed between the fir branches like red lamps.

There should be no more trouble for the Vicar. It would be a privilege to pay his debts. Sir Hubert would persuade him to listen to reason on this point; Hal would see to that. Then the Vicar must write a second book, not in refutation of his theories, but ‘pitching into everybody all round, like Byron did in his *English Bards and Scotch Reviewers*.’

‘The reviewers once settled—and your father can settle them with a few strokes of his pungent pen,’ went on Hal,—‘we can take high ground with

the bishop. In point of fact, we might ignore the bishop altogether. What will a man of mark like your father want with a doddering old fellow like that? There are always dozens of appointments open to men like him and Colenso, and fellows that aren't afraid to speak out. That'll be all right. Then—then I shall claim you, *Griselda*! I'll sell out, if you wish it, or you will have to put up with barrack life— Hallo! What's that?'

A man came leaping up the path as they turned a corner.

He stared, as if amazed. It was Hugh. He slightly saluted Romaine, then, turning to *Griselda*, said that Mr Black had been uneasy, and he had volunteered to go to meet her.

'Shall I go first?' he said, for the path was too narrow to admit of more than two

walking, or, rather, picking their way among the stones, abreast.

He had seen Griselda's bright smile, her beautiful blush, her hand on Hal's shoulder ; and, not having overheard young Romaine's sanguine talk about the Vicar, naturally attributed her beaming happiness entirely to her preference for her old playfellow.

So he went first, with a new bitterness of heart, the sunset reflected upon his pale sad face almost as if in mockery.





CHAPTER II.

COULD a new version of the old, old story be retold in a lovelier spot than Goarshausen that bright summer time, when Griselda, in spite of her sad childhood and serious youth, was buoyant with the elasticity of girlhood,—girlhood crowned with a happy love?

In itself the spot was so romantic. Below the windows of the stone hotel, the garden with its white paths among the turf and flower-beds, with its straight rows of acacias with their round bushy

green heads and slim stems, sloped down to the broad, rapid-running Rhine. The river was a marvel of loveliness. As it streamed by the vine-clad mountains and rocky heights, it had a fresh beauty each hour of the day. Pale and mystic, it murmured on in the grey light of dawn. When the first red rays caught the dancing wavelets, it changed from silvery white to blood-red, then shone all colours, like a gleaming pigeon's breast in the sunshine ; at noon it surged onwards, deeply blue, calmly unfathomable ; later, its wavelets would foam into snowy featherets, delightful to eyes that turned from the afternoon sun-glare ; at evening tide, it floated away into the distant shadows with a soft murmur, as if echoing its own tales and legends—legends of hundreds of wonderful years, before

romance fled at the sound of the sullen roar of the anti-romantic, ruthless steam-engine.

The river told different tales to different minds. It was all things to all men. The Vicar gazed from the window of his quiet room, and gradually his harassed brain and shattered nerves were refreshed. The lovers, Hal and Griselda, read stories of wonderful joys, of happiness undreamt of by any human beings from Adam and Eve until the very moment when they met and loved.

Hal Romaine, his handsome dark face aglow with success, his whole being radiant with a certain insolence of the conqueror which is so easy to forgive, wandered through those green gardens shading Griselda—who leant half timidly on his arm—with a huge white parasol he had purchased from one of the waiter

tribe who were always on the look-out for unconsidered trifles when they scented spooning or honeymooning. And Heaven alone knows how many lovely lies were cast off like beauteous bubbles under the shade of that white parasol, which that very season a bride had lost and had not cared to reclaim, lest she might lessen herself in the esteem of a young husband who was still in possession of the proud position of demi-god. Lovely lies, all of which Griselda, with the patient beautiful eyes, heard reverently, if wonderingly, as she heard gospel truth. How Sir Hubert Romaine, the bluff and proud, would not only accept her as his son's bride, but make her his darling. (He did not think much of the girls, Hal added parenthetically.) How Lady Romaine would delight in supplying the place, as

far as she could—naturally, she could not be expected to work miracles — of the dear young mother Griselda had lost. How Griselda's father, when his thoughts were occupied with his daughter's engagement and subsequent marriage, would quite forget his fads about not being able to believe this or that doctrine, and would become, like any other reasonable incumbent of a pretty country parish, in favour with the powers that be and those whose affairs those powers regulated.

‘I am so afraid he will mind!’ Griselda ventured to say one afternoon, as they were sitting under a spreading tree on a grassy bank in the hotel garden, Hall occupied in throwing a handful of smooth white pebbles into the river one by one. ‘I am so afraid—he—will mind!’

‘He! Who?’

Hal stopped and stared in astonishment.

‘My father.’

‘Mind—what?’

‘My — being — engaged to you,’
faltered Griselda, blushing.

It had been agreed upon, at Griselda’s instance, that her father was not to be spoken to on the subject of her and Hal’s mutual love until a certain day. Tomorrow was that day. Griselda’s reason for the postponement was that Mr Black was not well enough to think of serious matters for some little time, after that sudden, strange illness at Cologne.

‘Do I—understand—that you think your father will not be pleased to give you to me?’ said Hal, astounded; and, although he spoke gently, there was a dangerous light in his dark eyes. ‘It

is awfully bad form to talk of one's position in the world, of course. But you are such a simple-minded darling! You quite ignore what your status in society will be as my wife. Of course there is the title; then Feather's Court is not the only estate. The rent-roll—'

'Hal!' cried Griselda imploringly. 'Pray, pray don't! It is not that! You don't understand! It is just your title and your money and your estates that my father will object to—'

'Then he is utterly unlike all other fathers.'

'He is,' said Griselda simply. 'At least, he is unlike all other fathers who want worldly dross for their children. His heart is with the people—'

'Excuse me, my dear, if I interrupt

you,' said Hal cynically. 'You are the dearest girl, but you are utterly inexperienced. I cannot allow you to lay down the law to me about what this man thinks or the other man does—'

'No, no, dear Hal—of course not!' Griselda laid her pretty white hand on his coat-sleeve, almost dismayed. 'I should not have doubted, I should not have dreamt of such a thing—only—'

She hesitated. Hal threw a stone viciously into the river.

'Only what? Don't hang your head like that, Griselda!' he cried. 'Out with it! Only—what?'

'Only—Hugh spoke to me,' faltered Griselda. 'You know, since he came to the vicarage as a pupil, he has been so kind and good, looking after my father and advising me. Well, he

saw—at least—he got an idea into his head how things were going with us—I'm sure I don't know how or why, for father hasn't noticed anything, I know. Well, he spoke to me yesterday—'

'Very kind of Mr Blunt, I am sure, to interfere with my affairs!' muttered Hal, his cheek paling with jealous anger.

'Hal! He never mentioned you. He merely reminded me of my father's opinions—of his painful position, with the odium attached to that book and the bishop's suspension; then he talked of Sir Hubert and Lady Romaine—how proud they were—'

'And you listen to an impertinent jackanape's opinion of my father and mother,—the opinion of a fellow who never spoke to either of them in his

life, and who, thank Heaven, is never likely to ; upon my word, it's too much !'

Hal sprang up, went away, and leant disgustedly against the tree. Griselda followed him, anxious and penitent.

'Poor Hugh ! All the time he has been like a brother. I don't know—what I should have done without him !'

A tear fell on his hand, which she had seized. Melted at once—what very young man as wildly, passionately in love as Hal was, would not be moved at the touch of his adored one's tears ?—he said, with mild sarcasm,—

'Brother ? A brother like Tom and Harry ?'

'Oh no, Hal ! Quite, quite different !'

'Like young men generally are to other people's sisters, I suppose ?'

Hal felt relieved by this sneer. He had suspected that the Vicar's faithful pupil, Hugh Blunt, was in love with Griselda. Who could talk to her and watch her sweet candid face for a whole hour without being bewitched and enchanted?

‘The man who could see her, not only day after day, but week after week, and month after month, and not adore her, would be a stock or a stone,’ he told himself. ‘I must not be hard on the poor unfortunate devil for his miserable attempt at prevention of the inevitable. I should have done worse in his case.’

He was gazing half - fiercely, half-lovingly at Griselda, and she was wondering what the look meant.

‘You have no reason to be angry

with me, Hal,' she said, with gentle dignity.

'I know that. But, darling, you must give me your promise, your word, that no one shall come between us. You owe it to me.'

'I could not go against my father, Hal. And, even if he consents, and is pleased, as you seem to think he will be, I could not go against your parents.'

'You are very complimentary, I must say!' said Hal, all the more irritably, because Griselda's words embodied some vague forebodings of his own. 'I never have been contradicted and interfered with, and I never mean to be. You seem to forget that my will is pretty well law in my family.'

'Oh no, I don't!'

Griselda spoke as if the fact were a dreadful one. Hal laughed; Griselda's awe of his spoilt state flattered him.

‘I see you know the family have made to themselves a god, and that they bow down to it,’ he said good-humouredly. ‘Well, the god is generous. I am not half so tyrannical as some family deities. But it is ridiculous to talk of my father and mother opposing any wish of mine. And, as this is the case, you can imagine how incensed I am at the daring of a rank outsider presuming to meddle. Don't look at me reproachfully, Griselda! I shall take no more notice of your Mr Blunt than I should of a Cologne street cur who flew out of the gutter and barked at me. But matters must be placed on a secure footing at once, so that I don't have a repetition of this sort of thing.’

Hal did not let the grass grow under his feet. Early next morning he knocked at the Vicar's bedroom door.

Mr Black was reading in bed, propped up with pillows. He looked worn and thin, but smiled at Hal and laid down his book. He liked talking with this bright, handsome young fellow, who was so peculiarly respectful and sympathetic.

Hal began the conversation cautiously. Somehow the Vicar was expansive with him. It was easy to steer the talk till it reached the very core of John Black's worries. Hal even gently introduced the subject of the sceptical book. He repeated conversations he had heard at his father's dinner-table, which, because of the *Griselda* interest, he had remembered.

'Some were quite for you,' he went on.
'One old fellow, a quaint pedantic scholar

— I daresay you know him — Professor Blackett, of Cambridge, who wrote those celebrated *Comparisons between Plato and Aristotle*—said, quite excitedly—I recollect it well, because the fellows present said they had never seen Blackett so roused, before—“How dare a man be a preacher at all, if he does not intend to encourage thought in others? It is not the thought, but the want of thought, which is the mischief. No man who thinks will ever do much harm.” I remember that speech very well, because it set me thinking in my small way.’

‘So Blackett said a good word for me, did he?’ said the Vicar contentedly. ‘Well, now, there is something odd about that. He is a man I revere for his learning and his intense devotion to the subjects he chose for his life-work. But,

although he is known to receive men interested in science whenever they choose to seek him, I have never succeeded in meeting him. When I was first appointed to Crowsfoot, I was invited to dine and sleep at the bishop's, "to meet Blackett." I went, full of expectation. At the last moment came a telegram from the professor. He could not come. Some years later, Serjeant Slowman, the Q.C., was to have some men at his rooms. He invited me. Blackett was to be there. I was in an ante-room, looking at some microscopes Slowman had recently bought, when a tall old man passed through. They said it was Blackett. I got into the larger room just in time to see him pass out. He had started all in a hurry, suddenly — remembering some engagement, not a surprising thing at all in so

absent a man, of course! Well, the third time, a young fellow I had helped a little before his exams. came out first in the Tripos, and insisted upon my going to stay with him at his rooms at C. College. Well, he found out this fancy of mine to have a talk with Blackett, and left no stone unturned to manage it for me. Of course the prize-men, the mental athletes who have been crowned at the contest, carry all before them during the first bloom of their triumph. So one of the dons gave a dinner, and invited Blackett. Would you believe it? At the last moment he sent an excuse. So we were thirteen at table, and drank to the thirteenth, who was to be promoted before the year was out. It is curious, is it not—I mean the coincidence?’

‘If it had been anyone else, I

should have said he purposely avoided you.'

'But in my case that could not be. Blackett does not know me from Adam. He sees hundreds of insignificant fellows such as I am.'

'But he certainly took great interest in you,' said Hal musingly. 'I recollect now he said that you should not defend your opinions, either privately by letter or conversation, or publicly by articles or letters in the ecclesiastical papers. He thought you ought to write another book strengthening your position and establishing your views.'

'I thought of that,' said the Vicar, sighing.

How lightly this young man spoke of writing and publishing! There was the cost, and, even if all went well, there was that close heavy work. This brought

Griselda to his thoughts—Griselda, without whose patient, constant help another book—and a book which would require such mental labour as well as tact and research—could not be among the possibilities. And he spoke of her to the young man, little dreaming of what he did, till Hal began. . . .

He told him of their childish friendship; he lauded Griselda to the skies; he said that, whatever hope of lofty aims and pure feelings he had, he owed to the ideal she had given him of what a human creature might be. He even went so far as to say that, but for Griselda, he should have followed the fast fellows in his regiment, and have ‘gone to the bad.’

‘Now, now, my dear boy! You are extravagant!’

But Hal would or could not see it just

then. For some months past his life had moved along dully, quietly, and he had felt bored. The reaction had set in ; he was the old passionate, impetuous Hal, brooking no interference with, or contradiction to, his wishes.

‘But you have not seen Griselda for months!’ The Vicar, for whom Griselda’s affairs had always a tinge of ‘play’ about them—she was but such a child after all!—was almost amused. ‘Ah! my dear boy, live a few years longer, then talk as you have talked just now about some fairer and fitter damsel than my one little—lamb!’ Beginning his speech almost jocosely, he felt suddenly touched when he thought of his devoted daughter.

Had he not been Griselda’s father, Hal would have resented John Black’s talking to him as if he were a raw lad in his teens.

But, being this—being in possession of Griselda, as it were,—he repressed his annoyance, he suppressed his turbulence.

But he sat down by the Vicar, and pleaded long and earnestly. He said he knew Griselda was not averse to accepting him as her future husband.

He was detailing his plans for her comfort, her pleasure, her happiness, when a gentle knock came at the door, and Griselda came in.

She wore a cotton dress, with a forget-me-not pattern. Her fair cheeks, often as pale as a white rose, bloomed pink and fresh; her golden hair was knotted into a large soft yellow knot upon her long slim neck.

To her boyish lover she looked like some wood nymph coming straight from the dewy woods with all the fragrance

of the opening flowers, the sweetness of the morning air, the glint of the early sunlight about her as an atmosphere.

She had a cup of tea in her hand. She started and looked somewhat anxiously at Hal before she took this to her father's bedside. Then she looked still more anxiously at the Vicar.

Oh, Hal had told! There was a look in her father's eyes, half grave, half sympathetic, which convinced her of that.

She sat down by the bed, and turned her face as far away from both of them as she could.

Hal went up to her eagerly.

'I could not help telling your father,' he said, almost apologetically.

'Oh! So you two have been talking nonsense together as well? Is it so, Griselda?'

‘Whatever has been talked of—I mean, I talked against her wish—did I not, Griselda?’

‘If I had not wished to listen to you, I should not have listened,’ said Griselda. ‘Papa, is he wrong or right?’

‘You are neither of you wrong or right; you are a foolish boy, Hal—and Griselda—oh, I should not have thought you so silly! We may venture to talk of such things, seriously—if we are still in the same mind, remember—some years hence. But now—well, children must have their play, I suppose, like puppies and kittens. There—go—both of you—no, you go first, please, Mr Romaine.’

Hal was compelled to accept the Vicar’s banter, and to console himself with the reflection that perhaps it was not all banter; only that, considering his and

Griselda's youth, and his position as eldest of the young Romaynes, Mr Black did not like to commit himself.

But, banter or no banter, the instant the door closed upon him, the Vicar began to interrogate his child. While Hal was speaking, John Black had thought somewhat bitterly of his poor child's motherless position. He had thought how Griselda would have gone to her mother, and how the two would have talked of a new love, a new care coming into their lives, just as women talked of their little pink babies, or toddling children, or young broods of yellow chicks and ducklings.

It was a dreadful responsibility for a man to have to deal with a young daughter's first love. He felt nonplussed. It would have been easier to him, weak

though he was at that moment, to fire off the cannon at the rock hard by, or to deliver an extempore oration, in elegant Latin about the beauties of the Rhine from his bedroom window. As the instants went on, he grew more nervous. He felt he must say something, so he blundered out with,—

‘ Now—Griselda—what—what does all this mean ? ’

Griselda had recovered her composure, and answered at once,

‘ My best way will be to tell you all from the beginning.’

Then she gave an accurate account of her meeting and conversation with Hal on the hill yesterday—at least, with the one exception of the betrothal kiss.

‘ Well,’ said the Vicar judicially, ‘ do you not think you are very foolish ? ’

Griselda paused, then said, ‘No.’

‘What? My Griselda losing her common sense!’

‘Do you not think I could ever—oh, father, might I not be Hal’s wife some day?’

‘I cannot say I wish to see that day,’ said the Vicar gravely. ‘The Romaynes rank far above us in the social scale, and are as purse-proud as any persons I ever met. Depend upon it, dear, it is best to mate with equals. And for a man—I know nothing about women—it would be better, if he must do one or the other, to marry beneath him rather than that his wife and her family should look down upon him.’

‘Then—then—you say—no?’

‘My dearest child, how can I say either “yes” or “no” until I have been asked?’

I cannot listen to an offer of marriage to you from a young man under age. You, such a child! You are talking absurdities. There—kiss me and go—and—Griselda’—she returned somewhat reluctantly—‘not one word to Mr Romney till I come down—do you hear?’

‘Yes, father.’

Griselda flew upstairs to her room with burning cheeks. On the landing she came face to face with Hugh Blunt.

‘What is the matter?’ he asked.

‘Not much.’

She would have passed him and gone on to her room; but he detained her.

‘I would not pry into your secrets but that I am still, so to say, on guard.’

‘There is nothing that you may not know.’

‘I think I can guess,’ said Hugh, seri-

ously but kindly. 'I have eyes. So have others—so you must take care. Mr Romaine has asked your father to let you marry him, has he not? Ah—I see—yes! Well—he is very young. But some are for young marriages. What does your father say?'

'Laughs.'

'Laughs — does he?'

Hugh, who looked pale and tired, gazed down the corridor, with its patches of light coming from the side-windows, and thought half stupidly that the passage of life was something like that. First a bit of dark shadow, then a patch of light, then shadow again.

'Laughs—does he?' he repeated absently. 'Well, I don't think I should laugh, if I were he.'

'What would you do?'

‘I think I should be very angry at his daring to speak to you on such a subject—don’t shrink, Griselda! I may be wrong. I must not hurt you—although—well, I may as well tell you—this has hurt me very much. I did not expect you to be so rash, so precipitate. But you—what do you say in the matter?’

If she had looked at him—if she had seen his drawn face, the anxious, pained, loving look in his eyes—instinct would have checked the words before they left her lips.

‘If I do not marry Mr Romaine, I shall never marry.’

Hugh felt for the moment as if he had received an ugly stab. Then, with a slight shiver, he rallied himself.

‘That is the right spirit,’ he said kindly. ‘But excuse me if I say you are

very young, Griselda. Now, I want you to promise me one thing—will you?’

‘Certainly.’

Griselda started when she saw his ashen face.

‘If you are in any trouble—I don’t care what the trouble may be—but any trouble—whether it be night or day—that you may want help—you will send for me?’

Griselda, wondering, sorry, promised. Then she went to her room, worried, perplexed, scarcely happy, as she had expected to be.

Presently, when she thought her father would be downstairs, she went down.

A waiter was hovering about the staircase, watching for her. He beckoned her mysteriously aside, and placed a sealed envelope in her hands.

‘For my father?’ she asked.

Oh no! Of that he was certain. It was most certainly for the Fräulein from the Herr who had just left by the steam-boat.

Griselda gazed vaguely at the man, then at the envelope. Tearing it open, she saw—foreign bank-notes! She knew the blue, greasy papers well.

Her heart sank. What did it mean? Collecting herself, she went into the breakfast-room.





CHAPTER III.

THE 'Speise-Saal' of the Goarshausen Hotel was quite a fine saloon for a tourist halting-place on the Rhine. It had the usual slippery floor, huge mirrors, and somewhat gaudy painting and gilding.

Griselda, glancing rapidly round the long table, saw many strange faces — scarcely one that she had noticed before — ladies well dressed, vulgarly dressed, ill-dressed ; a sprinkling of bald-headed Englishmen, a few Heidelberg students with well-gashed faces—not one young

Englishman that looked like Hal Romaine or Hugh Blunt.

Before her father came in, she must know the contents of that envelope.

She had been too giddy and sick with apprehension to see the name on the card enclosed. As she sat growing paler and paler—she had sunk into the corner of one of the giant red velvet sofas—she twisted the envelope with her trembling fingers.

One of them had gone away, and had left her—yes, it was a horrid truth—had left her, money.

Which one?

She tore open the envelope desperately. The notes and the card fell to the ground. As the card fell she saw the name ‘Hugh Blunt.’

In that instant of fear, lest the name should be ‘Henry Romaine,’ Griselda

knew that men might come and men might go for ever; but that there existed but one man in the world she could love, beside her father and brothers, and that his name was Henry Romaine.

Her joy! Her elation! Her passionate inward thanksgiving! She was down on her knees, picking up that 'miserable card,' as she thought it, and 'those wretched German notes,' declining the aid of old gentlemen and waiters alike so sweetly that they felt quite annoyed that so lovely a girl would not let them help her.

One of the Heidelberg students, who had noticed that 'something went not well with *die Kleine*,' as they had nicknamed Griselda, looked benignly at her through his spectacles, and was preparing to leave the table and blandly afford his

assistance—a Heidelberg student would scarcely go through the farce, to him, of offering it—when Hal opened the door of the Speise-Saal, looked astonished to see Griselda fumbling about under the sofa for the last fluttering dirty old note, and went towards her.

‘What is it?’ he said, while the student, —who had taken an inveterate dislike to the young milord who was ordering champagne and rheinwein last night, and actually leaving half-bottles for the unappreciative Kellners while he remained a thirsty student — sat down again in disgust.

‘I don’t know,’ said Griselda vaguely.

‘Give me those papers, and come out.’

Hal gave her his arm, and, crunching the notes in his unoccupied hand, took her out, through the hall, into a sort of con-

servatory, where there were some shrubs in clay pots and a rustic seat. Then he released her, faced her, and stretched out his hand.

‘Give me that—rubbish,’ he said.
‘Who sent—it?’

‘Mr Blunt.’

‘What for?’

This was quite another Hal, speaking with the assumed calm of growing temper.

‘I—can’t tell—till I have looked at the card ; you have it there — among the notes.’

Hal unclenched his fingers, carefully taking out the card so that Griselda might not see it, and read poor Hugh’s pencilled message.

‘Griselda dear,—Do not think harshly of me for leaving you ; but, seeing that you have so able a protector, I feel my

place is at home with my mother, who is ill, and to whom I ought to have gone before. Use the enclosed, your father's hardly-earned money. Accept nothing, and remember your promise to me.'

Hal read the carefully-pencilled tiny writing.

'You have read this?' he said, in a voice that was so unlike his own; it hurt Griselda, innocent as she felt.

'No.'

'Then the unpleasant duty of telling you you have been grossly insulted devolves upon me,' said Hal. 'Come, Griselda, before you and I can make any arrangements about the journey, or your father, or anything, I must know what—this—means.'

'Means?'

'I must know on what terms you have

been with this fellow. Have you been engaged to him, and thrown him over?’

‘Hal! I engaged!’

‘Well, then, this is a very serious affair—that is all I can say,’ said Hal, handing her the card.

Griselda read it. The tears rose to her eyes.

‘Poor—kind—Hugh!’ she said.

Hal’s attitude and expression would have done credit to any of the warlike Heidelbergers in the Speise-Saal. At first his wrath bid fair to burst out. If it had—if that fair little head had bowed down to the storm of Hal’s anger—then Griselda’s patient pilgrimage through life might have been a very, very different one.

But that pure Marguerite-like girl looking straight up at him with those fearless,

innocent, loving eyes, had the power in these early days to tame the lion of ill-temper within him. He softened.

‘I—I love you so,’ he said, raising her cold hand and kissing it, ‘I cannot bear anyone to think a rude, rough thought about you, my darling.’

Then he took her in his arms and looked at her with anxious inquiry. And, while he tried to interpret her expression, he spoke gently of the necessity of her confiding in him absolutely and entirely, and of his being head of the three until the Vicar was safely back again in England, his affairs settled, and he himself once again in good health. He found out that Hugh Blunt had told Griselda he owed her father a great deal of money.

‘Then he can settle his accounts with your father another time, Griselda.’

‘You won’t send those notes back unkindly, Hal?’ He has been so good, so thoughtful, all through that dreadful time! It seems so ungrateful.’

‘I will do all that is just and right,’ said Hal, almost grinding his teeth as he took Griselda back to the Speise-Saal. And with that promise she had to be satisfied.

Mr Black was awaiting them, sitting alone where his party usually sat. The waiters had ‘known nothing’ of the Fräulein’s movements when the Vicar inquired for his daughter, gifted as they were with the peculiar discretion that seems part of the nature of a German waiter of the superior class.

So John Black was waiting. He was leaning back in his crimson-covered chair with the gilt nails, outwardly in contemplation of the fan-leaved plant in

the plated cooler before him, inwardly thinking over the events of yesterday and of this morning. His eyes were partially open to the fact that Hugh Blunt's devotion to him personally meant interest in Griselda. Hal Romaine's youthful enthusiasm had helped to this conclusion. He could not quite comprehend Griselda's attractiveness; but in this paternal denseness he was not alone.

Of course he did not actually intend to allow, of all persons, a mere boy to mend his affairs. But Hal's talk this morning had roused him.

'Where is Blunt?' asked the Vicar, as Romaine and Griselda seated themselves.

Hal shrugged his shoulders. The waiter who had secretly conveyed

Hugh's sealed envelope to Griselda and the waiter who had offered to help her pick up the bank-notes exchanged glances, as, a few minutes ago, they had exchanged confidences outside the Saal.

'*Sare?*' said one, pretending not to understand.

'Gone out, I suppose,' said Hal, reddening; he noticed, or thought he noticed, the waiter who had brought that letter, manœuvring to catch Griselda's eye; and it was bitter to him to have 'a low fellow like that' making signs to his future wife.

Griselda drank her coffee in peace. She had been accustomed to Tom's overbearing ways towards herself and Jemima, and those rows between the brothers, when good-tempered Harry

usually gave in. So, with her ideas of male temper, she had not thought Hal as annoyed as he really was.

She was congratulating herself on her father's evident improvement—he was talking quite cheerfully to Romaine. Even Hugh Blunt's sudden departure and Hal's temper could not prevent that being a real joy.

‘Still, I must not expect such happiness to continue,’ she was telling herself. ‘I must make the best of it while it lasts, for how well I know those troubles that come down upon one suddenly, when one feels like some nail that was just struck by the hammer.’

She had barely come to the end of her little moralising when a waiter, seemingly flicking a wasp from the

table hard by, slid a twisted note close to Griselda's plate, and pretended to pursue the uncaptured insect.

She saw 'Urgent — Private' written in pencil, then slipped away so quietly out of the room among some people who had finished breakfast, and were leaving the Speise-Saal, that neither the Vicar nor Hal Romaine noticed her.

'A milady Anglaise waits to see mademoiselle,' whispered the principal waiter - *intrigant*, pointing mysteriously upstairs. 'I take meess to milady when she read the note.'

Then he turned his back upon this calm young English 'meess,' who seemed such a strange centre to these mysterious proceedings, and to make her feel at ease began moving cups and saucers upon a side-table, although

there was not the remotest reason for his doing so, while Griselda read,—

‘If you have any regard for Mr H. Romaine see me at once.

‘A FRIEND.’

She did not recognise the handwriting, which was a trembling scrawl; so she asked the conspirator if the lady had left her name. And, to the little man’s horror—he was a neat, dapper, little man, with white shirt, spotless tie, and sleek, short hair—she asked the question in her clear penetrating treble, which might easily be heard in the Speise-Saal, and without a shade of the ‘English milady’s’ agitation when she had slipped half-a-sovereign into his hand, and had almost pathetically im-

plored him to take her to some *salon* not in use, and to persuade Miss Black to come to her unknown to anyone.

‘Hush-sh-sh!’ he said, frowning; then he ran upstairs, beckoning so energetically that Griselda followed.

Who could it be—Lady Romaine?

The conspirator opened the door of a hot, stuffy room with crimson walls, carpeting, and those ruddy velvet chairs, and, closing it upon his captured ‘English meess,’ stood waiting in the corridor, as he had promised the milady to do, to prevent the ladies being disturbed.

The mysterious dame rose from her seat as Griselda came in. She was stout, with her grey hair well dressed under a matronly bonnet, and gorgeous skirts of pale Indian silken material.

She lifted her veil, and Griselda saw the angry face of Lady Romaine.

Lady Romaine had been struggling to be cool and composed with Griselda. But, when she saw the fair beauty of this self-possessed, innocent-faced girl, and felt what a peculiar power this combination of so many qualities in one woman must necessarily have over her son's ardent, tempestuous temperament, it was difficult to be calm, and her voice trembled as she said,—

‘My son is here, Miss Black?’

‘Yes,’ said Griselda. ‘I hope nothing is wrong; do sit down.’

Then she seated herself quietly on a chair near Hal's mother, accepting Lady Romaine's actual rudeness of manner, and folding her hands as quietly in her lap as if she were talking to Doctor

Mayne at home at Crowsfoot, or to his kind old wife.

Was this girl's behaviour daring, or impertinence, or ignorance, or defiance? Lady Romaine trembled with mingled fear and vindictiveness.

Her lips were so dry she could scarcely articulate.

‘You ask me what is wrong, Miss Black? Are you so lost to all sense of propriety, or have you never learnt it? Our son leaves us, without a word, without explanation or notice, and runs away after you. If it had not been for the sagacity of our good, honest courier, we should have employed detectives to find him. Think of the disgrace—our son, who is to be Sir Henry Romaine some of these days, and will marry into some old family—being run after by de-

tectives, and everyone in society hearing of it! I wonder at you turning temptress when you and your father ought to be hiding your faces somewhere, after he has behaved as he has—writing that horrible book—’

Griselda, who had stared and had bitten her lip during Lady Romaine’s tirade, rose at the mention of her father’s name, and peremptorily said ‘Stop!’ Then, before Lady Romaine had had time to see what Griselda was about, she had rung the bell—a peal that could be heard down below.

‘The remainder of our conversation had better be with my father and Mr Romaine here,’ said Griselda quietly; then the door was opened, and the conspirator appeared, somewhat scared by his sudden summons. He had barely walked a few yards up and

down outside in the corridor, wondering what this mystery all meant, before the ring came, and Griselda said, as soon as he appeared,—

‘ Please tell Mr Black and Mr Romaine that Lady Romaine is here.’

‘ You audacious girl!’ said milady, too taken aback to negative the order.

She could have burst into hysterical tears ; but with a superlative effort, controlled herself, and only said falteringly,—

‘ To think—that your good little mother’s daughter should turn out—thus!’

Griselda paled. It was a hard thrust. As Lady Romaine moved restlessly to the window, two large, cold tears rose into her eyes. She remembered that scene at her mother’s grave, and Hal, a little boy, standing at her side, so chivalrous and reverent. She wiped those tears

away as if they were sacred. And, sitting there, still as some marble monument, she told her sad soul that no part of her being must disgrace that dear lost mother, that dear living father, or her promised husband, Hal; and she said ‘God teach me!’ in her heart, as she used to say it years ago, at night, kneeling up in her little bed, and wondering which of the stars were mother’s eyes watching her to see if she took care of father and the boys.

Then in came—first Hal, then John Black—happily by no means dismayed by his distinguished visitor. The Vicar bowed gravely. Hal—pale, with a curious light in his eyes—went across to his mother, after a survey of Griselda which told him at least a little of what her interview with Lady Romaine had been.

‘What is this?’ he said.

‘A charming way to receive me, your mother, after all we have suffered!’ and at last Lady Romaine buried her face in her pocket-handkerchief and sobbed out an incoherent complaint—running away after people—leaving his family—scandal—detectives—the talk of the county—loss of position, *et cætera*—Lady Maria Wick’s hand could not possibly be asked for by Sir Hubert, and so on.

‘My mother is hysterical,’ said Hal contemptuously, turning to the Vicar. ‘This is no place for Griselda, Mr Black.’ Then he went to Griselda, and said imploringly, ‘Dear love, you will go with your father—just for a little while, will you not? As soon as my mother is better, I will bring her to your room.’

‘Thank you,’ said Griselda, with a grateful look. But she did not take his offered arm. She went to her father, who was standing by the excited Lady Romaine, and said, ‘Father, what am I to do?’

‘Stay a while,’ said John Black, in his old, firm, resonant tones. As he stood there, his strength seemed to have returned to him. He was the truthful outspoken pastor of Crowsfoot, rough to some, tender to others. Those dark, grave eyes were fixed upon the sobbing woman penetratingly. He understood what this meant at once, and at once he acted as he had intended to act—when he had thought what might come.

‘So soon!’ he muttered. ‘Poor child! But perhaps it is best so.’

Then he put his arm round Griselda, and spoke firmly but not unkindly to Lady Ro-

mayne. He expressed no regret that Hal had left his parents, and had joined himself and Griselda at Goarshausen, because he felt none. He merely said that he was sorry to see her so distressed, and wished to know what he could do for her ladyship. Meanwhile Hal, his hands thrust into his pockets, was pacing the room and kicking aside the chairs when they happened to be in his way with such boyish rage that the Vicar could not help smiling.

‘Do?’ said Lady Romaine, with a bitter glance at Griselda. ‘You have done enough already, Mr Black! I will not allude to painful matters. I will merely state that you cannot expect Sir Hubert and myself to consider you a fitting acquaintance for our son. At all events, until our good friend the bishop—’

Here Hal, muttering an oath between his teeth, sprang forward.

His eyes blazed, his hands were clenched. He looked dangerous. Lady Romaine sprang up with a little shriek. But the Vicar had quickly stepped between them.

‘Don’t behave like a schoolboy, or worse,’ he said, firmly grasping Romaine’s arm. ‘Remember this is your mother. Remember what I said to you but an hour or two ago. Only with your parents’ consent can you have anything to do with me and mine.’

‘And that consent you will never have,’ cried Lady Romaine, less afraid of Hal while John Black’s thin but powerful hand gripped his arm. ‘Your father and I have spent our lives planning and arranging that you may occupy a foremost place in society. Putting aside your ingratitude,

we are scarcely likely to allow ourselves to fail at the last moment.' Then she added, with a spiteful sneer, 'How can you expect to be accepted into any noble family when it is known that you ran all over Germany after some girl?'

All this time Griselda had stood close to her father, pale but not unnerved. Only when her lover's mother spoke her taunt with such withering emphasis, she gave a little shudder, and involuntarily clasped her father's arm.

'You had better not insult my future wife,' cried Hal.

Here he stopped short, for Lady Romaine actually screamed and put her hands over her ears.

'Oh, I see it all!' she went on. 'Oh, the wicked, wicked plot! I must—I must claim your father's protection—'

‘Pray, accept mine meanwhile,’ said John Black, with a smile. There seemed something so childish and pitiful to him in this mother’s altercation with her son. ‘And be perfectly at ease on our account, Lady Romaine. If my daughter should ever marry—which is not very likely, for we have other thoughts and aims in this life, she and I—she will have to be asked for by the parents of the man she loves with as much ceremony as if she were a princess. Her mother’s daughter is too precious in my sight to be lightly treated.’

John Black was thoroughly roused. His temporarily clouded brain was almost strong and clear as of old.

As he stood there, tall, with a certain proud presence which was seldom seen except by those he held in just con-

tempt, Lady Romaine's temper began to subside. She even had an uncomfortable sensation that she had not made these people feel her grandeur and her dignity as she had intended that they should feel them.

She accepted the Vicar's arm, just touching it with the tips of her fingers, and said, more calmly,—

‘Come, Hal!’

Hal started as if he had been stung.

‘With you?’ he said bitterly. ‘Not if I know it!’

‘You cannot stay here, Mr Romaine. If you stay, my daughter and I leave by the next boat.’

‘Griselda’—Hal went up to her—
‘what do you wish me to do?’

Lady Romaine flushed a deep red. He was her idol, that Hal of hers.

When she heard his voice, full of love and tenderness, a few moments after it had been insolently pitched when he spoke to her—she had that acute punishment of idol-makers when their living idols turn upon them.

Oh, how she hated Griselda—even when the girl gently said, ‘You must not stay, Hal!’ What right had that girl to look at her son with those big eyes of hers, and to call him ‘Hal’ before her very face?

Then she gave a little jump, and cried ‘Ah!’ For, after a long look at Griselda, Hal came to her fiercely.

‘Do you see what you have done?’ he cried. ‘You have turned the only being I really love against me. Are you a fool—or are you playing into the hands of Satan?—if there be a Satan.

She would have made a good man of me ; she would have kept me right.'

'To think of leaning upon a woman is confessing oneself a broken reed, Hal.'

The Vicar spoke kindly.

'Were you a broken reed, sir? Did you not tell me what Mrs Black was to you? But it did not need telling! Everyone knew—'

'Yes,' said the Vicar hurriedly. 'But —but—I was a lone man, with no responsibilities of wealth, of—of—old family. You have these—and more. Parents, sisters, younger brother—'

'Then how do you explain that "a man should leave father and mother and cleave to his wife"?''

'We will not open such a discussion,' said John Black.

'Scripture! I should think not in-

deed!’ said Lady Romaine emphatically. She did not really mean to remind the Vicar of his unfortunate treatise; but Griselda saw her father wince.

‘Father, let us go!’ she said almost passionately; then she said ‘Good-bye’ to Hal.

Heaven knew whether he would not have kissed her there and then; but she was out of the room and away before the three realised that she was gone.

Hal sprang to follow her; but John Black stood in the doorway, and almost thrust him back.

‘Understand,’ he sternly said, ‘both you, Henry Romaine, and you, my lady. If any communication be made to my daughter by, or by the agency of, any member of your family, I will never

allow her to speak to one of you—on this earth again. Something tells me—God knows what!—some instinct—that the day will come, Lady Romaine, when you will perhaps be begging my daughter of me as wildly, maybe as hopelessly, as the rich man begged that drop of water of the beggar Lazarus. Therefore remember my words, and be advised not to widen the gulf—for it is a gulf rather than a breach—which will lie between myself and my daughter—and you Romaines—from this moment.’

He bowed, and left them.

‘That man is a prophet,’ said Hal. He was checked, impressed—therefore collected. ‘Madam—for to call you mother would be a mockery—I am ready to accompany you as soon as you

please along that broad and pleasant road which leads, in any case, to a better place than this red room has been since I entered it. Do you wish to stay here, Lady Romaine, as you have succeeded in hunting out as well as insulting my friends?’

His mother took refuge in tears.

Hal rung the bell, ordered rooms for his mother, and notified their departure the following morning. Then, taking no further notice of Lady Romaine, he sent for his despatch-box and wrote letters—business letters to England—in furtherance of the plans he was rapidly making to be of assistance to John Black and Griselda. The last letter was for the Vicar himself.

‘MY DEAR SIR,—I forgot to forward

you enclosed notes, which Mr Blunt—who was suddenly summoned home—says, are your property. You were not considered well enough to be told that Mr Blunt had left Goarshausen so suddenly. I had hoped to have been a shield to you now. I may be—even yet. Meanwhile, may God bless you, and keep and cherish the one so inexpressibly dear to us both—is the most earnest prayer ever uttered by your grateful

HENRY ROMAYNE.'

Griselda came into the sitting-room, her boxes packed, her little cloak on, ready to start, when this letter of Hal's was brought to Mr Black.

She had kept her composure well till he handed it to her. Then she gave a sad little cry.

‘Oh, father, what shall I do?’

John Black drew the slender creature on his knee, and held her head on his shoulder. He heard her sob; but he merely stroked her head and let her cry.

‘My lamb has taught me a lesson,’ he said caressingly. ‘I faced the storm, too self-reliant, and it beat me down, ay, to the very ground. But she bends to it—so it will pass over.’

‘Oh, I am glad, glad because you are stronger!’ said Griselda, raising her head, and smiling through her tears. ‘Though I do love Hal—father, ever since the boys used to tell me that, if I waited patiently, a prince would come for me; and one day, in the orchard, I was sitting waiting, as usual, and Hal came, so fine in his velvet and lace and finery,

that I thought he was a prince.' Then she told the remainder of the childish story, ending with — 'I would never, never marry anyone else! But it would be wicked to mind Lady Romaine's talk while I ought to be saying thanksgivings all the time, for you are better, dear! Oh, I know you are going to be well now!' she went on, kneeling down, and looking up into his face.

'Your nursing — Hal's good-nature, poor lad! — and Blunt's devotion,' said the Vicar musingly; 'then that arrogant woman — one thing with another — has brought about a reaction, thank God, Griselda! I was delirious? Yes! I said nothing anyone could understand? Well, they might have heard whatever I had to say. I must be careful, though, my child. But we will go home, you

and I? We will be peaceful and quiet, and I will battle through. There may be hard times—but I will shield my darling—by thinking of her first, even as she thought of me.’

Then there was a bustle outside, and shouting, whistling; the steamer had arrived.

It was a hard moment when the last bell rang, and John Black and his daughter stepped on board to begin their return journey. Griselda resolutely sat with her face towards St Goar, her back towards Goarshausen. She had given one pitiful glance at the beautiful spot where she had joyed and sorrowed so sharply, so rapidly. The sun was shining; the people were sitting under the trees in the hotel garden. Beyond lay the narrow valley, the wooded hill, and above

was the tall mountain she and Hal had talked of climbing together.

She saw it all, and knew she most likely would never see it again, except in her dreams.

And Hal saw her. He had chosen a shady corner where he would not be noticed. He felt very dejected, forlorn, miserable. It would have been some consolation, he thought, if she would have looked back and waved her handkerchief. How quickly the steamer went ! Wind and tide both in her favour, she was almost shooting down stream. In a few minutes she would steam past that dark grey mountain where the trailing vineyards looked like green trellis-work. She had reached the first cottage of that hamlet nestling below the pass. Now her funnels were black against a

white bridge—now she was being covered by a rocky prominence on the bank he stood upon—then his eyes grew misty—the vessel was gone. Griselda was—gone!

A gun was fired, and the echoes of the shots reverberated from hill to hill all along the valley, like a parting salute.

He turned away, and went uphill. He got to the clearing where they had been so gloriously happy together. The sunshine played about the waving boughs. It was all so peaceful—so beautiful—and he?

He was, he told himself, more forlorn, miserable, and forsaken than the poorest beggar that ever picked up a living in the gutter.

It was a bad half-hour. But what would it have been if he could have seen a vision of himself—as he would be—but a few years later?



CHAPTER IV.



ROWSFOOT again—ten years ago, when Griselda was a child, a mere straggling, tumble-down village. Now the autumn sunshine poured down upon pleasant, wholesome dwelling-houses. There was a whole new lane of red-brick, picturesque cottages, each standing in its own neat garden, each with its porch and verandah, yet honest sanitary dwellings for the poor. This was called ‘the Vicar’s street.’ He it was who had not rested till, by dint of saving, scraping, subscription-getting, and

working in with building-funds, he saw his old friends and their children 'decently housed, as Christians should be.' When he first became their pastor—young, strong, with his beloved wife, healthy and sound, at his side—he had valiantly attacked the many-headed dragon of Crowsfoot deficiencies. Ponds were filled in, cesspools discovered and destroyed, ventilation insisted upon. The Vicar—'our Vicar,' as his humble friends proudly called him—had taught his people physical as well as moral lessons. The result was—a thriving, neat population; a school-house known amongst schoolhouses as the one which produced the best scholars. A church, a model of simplicity, crammed full at each service till late-comers subsided into the porch. A rapid increase in numbers, for the Vicar advocated early

marriages, and always smiled upon honest attachments, even among the very young. And last, but not least, a whole crop of enemies—sprung from John Black's success. One-third of the whispers that had reached the bishop's palace were the whispers of clergy and parishes who envied John Black, and said, 'A man might easily create a model village who had somebody to back him up.' Who the 'somebody' was, no one knew. If they had been told that the 'somebody' was the Vicar's steadfast will and unflagging energy, they would have smiled incredulously.

In ten years the great chestnuts had grown more spreading still, and the village green kept its green beneath their stately shade. The schoolmaster and mistress were aged. Their school-

house was barely visible, covered by a great wistaria. The blacksmith was darker, tougher, and brawnier. The forge was enlarged, and some of those who toddled to the infant-school ten years ago were now his apprentices, beating the glowing red iron till the sparks flew around the busy anvils. Doctor Mayne was bent and old, and drove a pony-chaise instead of a gig. He kept an assistant now, a young fellow who had passed his second M.B., who could hardly hide his contempt for country practice, and who took care to let the 'educated people' among Doctor Mayne's patients be well aware that he would not have temporarily accepted the position but that 'in the M.D. examination they had a way of asking you questions which you could

not answer, however good a theorist you might be, unless you had practice.' Mrs Mayne took good care of this London light of the profession, but could not help disparaging him to her feminine friends, especially when they took a stroll in the churchyard, after Sunday-morning church—a favourite time for the tit-bits of village confidences.

And the vicarage? But little change there. The quaint little 'front garden' neat as ever. Within, the Vicar's coats, hats, guns, fishing-tackle, and curiosities all in their places. The old clock ticked solemnly in the passage, its round white face reflected in the glass of the barometer opposite. The 'red parlour' or dining-room, looking upon the lane, was more cheerfully arranged than it used to be when the young house-mistress

Griselda was a mere baby, her mother a hopeless invalid, and Jemima house-keeper. There was a modern easy-chair for the Vicar, and a library table; and the table near the crimson sofa had an embroidered cover, and held books and a vase of flowers.

The little drawing-room looking upon the garden was left as it was when Mrs Black lay for the last time on the sofa under the window; Griselda had made white covers for the furniture. But her mother's work-box was on the table by the sofa; the footstool on which Griselda used to sit, watching the invalid, was in its place. Also the screen which the schoolmistress and some of the head-scholars had worked, and all the little knicknacks offered by sympathisers to the poor lady who died with such sad slowness.

John Black had avoided this room. Griselda went in daily, to dust and replace fresh flowers and rearrange, as if this were a domestic chapel and she the sacristan.

This early September day was bright; soft breezes played gently with the nodding dahlias. A young robin hopped about the gnarled old apple-trees in the orchards, twittering snatches of songs, as if he were not yet sure of what he really thought of the world. The apples were mostly gathered. Some late plums were still ripening on the brick walls, and now and then a ripe pear fell from the laden boughs into the long grass. The figures moving in the field beyond the garden were Griselda and Jemima. Part of the field was mown for a drying-ground. The old cow and the

rector's horse looked on gravely from a distance. They were accustomed to those rows of white flapping linen now. Griselda and her faithful old servant had been waiting for Tom and Harry to depart their several ways to 'get through their wash.' A woman came to do the hard part of the work, and Jemima, who was lame and purblind, hated to see Griselda helping with the drying and folding, and would have done it all herself; but since her young lady had come back from 'furrin' parts, she'd been changed like,' Jemima would tell her gossip and crony over the way, the wife of old James, the captain's farm-bailiff. 'She's got a queenly way wi' her, which ain't like her blessed mother one bit, and which takes a rheumatic old body like me aback like.

And I can't say yea and nay in the right places. But she's as beautiful as a brand-new shining pin, and as straight; only she don't look to me, so to say, strong. And, there—I do object to her carryin' about those heavy linen sheets, and a pegging them on the line! I've often a mind to get up at dawn, just when the birds begin to twitter, and do it all myself. But, Lor' bless you! my old bones ain't what they was, nor never will be!'

Griselda, in her blue frock, her sleeves rolled up, was 'queening' now—she was unpegging some fine things into a small basket, and sent off Jemima with it indoors.

'You get those nicely starched, and, when I've got this lineful done, I'll come in and make that plum-pie for father's dinner.'

Jemima went meekly. Yes, there was a change in Griselda, even in three short weeks. There were those two lines about the mouth which tell of drooping and compressed lips. Her eyes were hazy, her cheek-bones were sharp, her skin pale, and her pretty bare arms far less softly plump than they had ever been. She worked away packing the dry linen into the baskets all the more briskly because she was anxious.

When they first returned, John Black heard that the bishop was shooting grouse in the North; that all the heads of the Everest firm were holiday-making, and that the tormenting publisher was shortly expected home from Norway.

So he waited to see those enemies of

his, and went about his parish, where he found that the cloud that hung over him was well known.

His people received him so warmly. It was welcome to every house, to each cottage. But, though they were full of talk, and were loth to let him depart, following him to the door and gazing after him wistfully, no one asked any questions about himself. They told him that the mild curate who was doing his church-work, and who lodged at the mill, was 'well enow as young parsons went'; but they did not inquire whether his throat was better, or when he would preach them one of his old stirring sermons again.

'No, they think me a blasphemer,' he said bitterly to himself; 'they, whom I have cherished as brethren—ay, even

as my very own children in flesh and blood—pity me, my God! I see it in their faces!’

He went home; and Griselda, coaxing and cosseting him as she had dared to do since they were so closely brought together at Goarshausen, heard his complaint, and tried to talk him out of his ideas.

‘Ah, well!’ he said with a sigh. ‘Time mends all.’ But Crowsfoot was a painful pleasure now. Each landmark—each familiar face, the cottages, the schoolhouse, the church he had restored, his wife’s green grave—were so many reproaches. As he went about, he seemed to hear, ‘Why have you forsaken us? Why could you not live and love on in simple faith, and not turn to the “strange woman” of Doubt—not only

telling, but publishing to the world her sayings—which you can never recall?’

No, that was where the shoe pinched. He had run up a flag, and he must stick to it.

‘Time—time will bring us through,’ he almost feverishly repeated. He waited eagerly to hear that the bishop had returned. Then he was off to town. He had been in town nearly a week when Griselda was busy with her linen in the drying-ground. She was thinking, half in fear, half in hope, of what news he might bring. When the lines were empty—only a peg or two hanging here and there—she paused before carrying in the baskets, and took the letter she had received from her father that morning from her pocket.

‘DEAREST,—I hope to be back with you

to-night, perhaps this afternoon. Then I will tell you as much as I can of my doings in this man-made metropolis, which I would willingly turn my back upon once and for all.

YOUR FATHER.'

She had read it many times, trying to guess facts from the spirit—the tone—of the sentences. Was he sad—angered? He had so often said that old saying, 'God made the country, man made the town,' and hated bricks and mortar in masses so, that his sentence about London was no key to his frame of mind.

No; she must be patient.

Then she read another letter, which had arrived at the same time.

It was from Hugh Blunt. Her father had told her to open all letters; so she opened this. It was the first they had

heard of Hugh Blunt since he left them so suddenly at Goarshausen, and the letter was to the Vicar.

‘MY DEAR SIR,—I have been told you are back at Crowsfoot. When can I return to you? And could you receive a friend of mine who is very anxious to read with you? He does not mind about quarters; you could stow him away anywhere, or he could share my room. He is Lord Lisle’s youngest son, and has unmistakable ability for abstract science. A line in return would oblige; but, if this finds you busy, we will take silence as consent, and appear on the usual day.—Always your grateful pupil,

‘HUGH BLUNT.’

‘P.S.—It will be a charity to rid young

Bray of as much of his superfluity as you will, for he is one of those uncomfortable wealthy persons who do not know the value of money till they can learn it. I promise that, if you take Bray, he shall not be the slightest trouble.'

Griselda thoughtfully folded and re-folded that letter. She had 'seen through' kind Hugh's proposal. A rich pupil would be a useful crutch just now. Would her father take him? She could detect that Hugh, naturally rather rough and devoid of tact, had worded that letter with minute care, lest he should offend the Vicar's sensibilities.

She replaced the letter in her pocket, stroked the nose of the old horse, who not having quite conquered his horror of those oddly-shaped white things called shirts, came up to salute her when the

clothes-lines were empty—then she bravely lifted her basket and went staggering up the garden-walks with it, brushing the dewy cobwebs from the overgrown clumps of fuchsia with her blue skirts, and, as she panted, her pale face flushing till she looked as ruddy as one of the tall holly-hocks, her heart-beats were loud, and the heavy basket creaked, so she did not hear her father's footstep in the passage.

‘Griselda!’

His cry startled her, she dropped the basket. All the white linen went tumbling down, some upon the gravel walks, some upon the beds—crushing the yellow escholtzias and the tender little heartseases.

‘There—she will do it, sir, and there's no a saying of her nay!’

Jemima, following her master, saw her

opportunity, and made a clean breast of Griselda's self-will there and then.

‘There's many a strong lass in the village as 'ud be thankful to earn a few honest pence; look at miss, sir. She'll be having a twisted spine of the back, like poor Maria Brown.’

‘I will arrange all that, Jemima.’

‘I hope and trust that you will, sir.’

Jemima sniffed, and retired to the kitchen. She had her own ideas as to the Vicar's position in his own house.

‘Will you come to the parlour, father?’

John Black said ‘No, no!’ emphatically. He wanted no tea, he said, nor dinner either—at least, not then.

‘I want air,’ he said, going out into the sunlit garden, Griselda following, unrolling her sleeves, and Jemima left picking

up the linen. ‘Air—and home, and you. Come, let us go into the orchard. Oh, Griselda’—he stood still in the long grass, looking haggardly round at those trees, each one a familiar friend, at the quiet September sky, the blue background of the foliage—‘if you could only know the difference between this and that great awful city—the roughness, the turbulence, the riot! Lies beset you and follow you, and, beat them away as you might a cloud of summer flies, they return and pester doubly. The only honest thing is bare open sin; swearing, fighting—at least, these are true. But, if a man be civil to you, he is secretly lying and thieving; if help be offered you, it is capital offered you at one hundred per cent. Thank God for every acre of ground untrodden by man! If air did not blow up from the

great ocean and from unpolluted wilds, we should be poisoned; the end of the world would be that all must be suffocated and smothered by sin.'

Griselda never commented upon her father's outbursts. Now she merely led him silently to a rustic bench which of late years had been removed from the garden into the orchard; and, sitting by him on the very spot where Tom had been digging when Hal Romaine came stepping down upon the grass like a fairy-tale prince, she said,—

'How was it? Good, bad, or indifferent?'

The Vicar hesitated.

'Well—indifferent.'

'Did you go to the bishop?'

'First of all. He was stopping at his usual hotel. I thought to catch him at

about eleven. He was not "about." I had to wait while he breakfasted.'

'Was he—kind?'

'A little starchy and stand-off, until he mentioned your letter. He said, "Don't look guilty; it is all right. A man who possesses a daughter like yours, Black, ought to consider he has enough." He said your letter "touched him." Then, of course, we had a discussion.'

'What was settled?'

'That matters are to remain *in statu quo* for the present, until I have tried a second book. You must help me, darling, as you did before, with those interminable references. Then, whether I leave or stay will be decided.'

'Leave — or stay?'

Griselda did not understand.

‘Leave the Church of England or stay in it.’

‘You, so fit to care for everyone! Oh, father, the bishop cannot know, he cannot dream of what you really are!’

‘I thought of resigning before, Griselda, when they were first down upon me.’

‘But, if you resigned, what then?’

‘I should be an ordinary layman, taking pupils.’

Griselda produced Hugh Blunt’s letter. The Vicar read it carefully, twice.

‘Hugh is very kind,’ he began; then he looked at Griselda. She was perfectly unconscious of the meaning of his inquiring glance.

‘I cannot make it out,’ he went on thoughtfully. ‘You and I have a secret friend, do you know?’

Griselda's face and neck flushed crimson. She turned her head away.

'I will tell you,' went on the Vicar. 'I have as yet only told you about my interview with the bishop. My next important piece of business was to see the Everests. I had no difficulty in finding them. They were far more civil than I expected. They acknowledged that they were still agreed to remain in the same position towards me in regard to the "treatise which had caused so much controversy." But they said that a client of theirs was willing to supply me with the ready money I required, at a moderate percentage.'

'Oh, father!' Griselda, knowing the low state of the Vicar's finances, brightened up. 'Oh, I am glad! You can pay those wretched publishers.'

‘ But I could not accept it, dear.’

‘ Why not ?’

‘ They refused to tell me the name of their amiable client. That settled the affair.’

Griselda had learnt a little of her father’s position. She never wondered when he exclaimed against subterfuge and deceit. She knew he had never rightly known who he was, or under what parental tree he might battle with his fellows.

She shook her head unconsciously. Oh, that money ! If only human beings could grow out of the ground and bear their fruit calmly, nourished by their mother earth, and by rain out of the pure sky !

‘ I am sure the earth must think far less of us than of the trees and shrubs,’ she said, speaking her thoughts aloud.

‘Why?’

‘They grow from her; they are pure and fresh and sweet. But, when we human creatures mingle with her, we are nothing but rottenness and corruption.’

‘Griselda, you have a curious way of thinking. I shall not come to you for similes.’

She shrugged her shoulders.

‘Are you going to take this rich young man, father? I don’t know how it is; but he reminds me of the “rich young man” who went sorrowfully away.’

‘I hope he will not. I hope they will both come, darling. Then I can pay those publishers.’

‘Do they refuse to wait?’

‘I gave them a bill.’

‘What is that?’

‘It is equivalent to paying them the

money. But the less you know of these things the better I shall be pleased. Only I may tell you this for your comfort, darling. If Hugh and his friend do come, I do not see any reason why we shall not steer through quite comfortably.'

'Then with all my heart I wish they may come!' said *Griselda* devoutly. 'I will do all I can to make them happy; I shall only be overwhelmed with gratitude to them for coming!'

If she could have known, poor innocent child! of what complications were in store—of what would arise out of all this, those words would have been the very last she would have spoken—she would have indeed been at her very wit's end.

But she had no misgiving, she felt no strange warning. No single black bird

flew over her head; no warning wind howled in the chimney, when she went to her tiny bed-chamber that night; no dream even troubled her young mind as she lay calmly sleeping. She was as untroubled by presentiments of her coming sufferings as a new-born infant is untroubled by thoughts of death.





CHAPTER V.

OCTOBER—clear, frosty, the columns of smoke rising straight into the air from the chimneys of Crowsfoot village, the woods around growing wet in the morning sunshine, masses of gold, red—every shade from pale yellow to ruddy chesnut—the sparkling white veil that lay upon the meadows at early dawn melting gradually away.

Breakfast-time at the Vicarage ; a small wood fire burning pleasantly in the crimson parlour ; the bright copper kettle hissing away on its trivet ; a few logs and

the tiny bellows lying just inside the old-fashioned brass fender ; the great tabby cat Tim sitting up on the tiger-skin rug, purring and blinking contentedly at the first fire of autumn, and at his beloved mistress Griselda, alternately.

Griselda was flitting about arranging the breakfast-table. She wore a brown woollen dress, and looked less careworn, in spite of her hard work the last few weeks. The young men—the Vicar's old pupil Hugh Blunt, and his new pupil Mervyn Bray, the youngest son of the rich Lord Lisle — arrived a month ago. There was more housekeeping for Griselda in consequence, and she was working hard to help her father with that second treatise on certain Epistles. She was up early, to arrange household matters with Jemima for the day. Then, while Blunt

and Bray were shut up with the Vicar in his study all the morning, she would ferret out passages from the learned tomes—some of them ancient ecclesiastical works in Latin and Greek—which her father would require for his next few pages. In the afternoon she visited in the parish, or took a class in the school, or presided at a Dorcas meeting with her old friend Mrs Mayne, or had a hard afternoon's mending and darning at home; for Jemima's eyes had to be spared. Griselda often told herself with a sigh that she was one of those whose lifework was rather to save than make. But in the evenings, when Hugh—who never alluded to the events that happened during that German tour, but was the same cheerful brotherly friend as of old—would smoke and play cards with young Bray in their rooms upstairs,

or go for a stroll with him, Griselda worked with her father in the study. She knew the first—the condemned treatise by heart. She not only knew the letter, but the spirit of it, only too well. She had a clear brain. The Vicar found her a great help. Her thoughts marched alongside his, as it were, and fell out of their ranks when wanted. Last night John Black had encountered a knotty point. He ran his fingers through his hair, he leant back in his chair and closed his eyes, thinking deeply, to no purpose. He closed the books. ‘I can do no more,’ he said, with a sigh, ‘until I see a passage, which I believe to be in a certain work of Thomas Aquinas. I must wait. I cannot leave those young fellows and go up to town—to the Museum—they have it there. I must wait.’

‘Don’t you know anyone who has the book?’ Griselda asked.

The vicar thought that perhaps one of the antiquarian booksellers might lend it to him. But this little check had discouraged him. Hard work accompanied by anxiety was not a tonic.

Griselda had lain tossing, dreaming; then thinking, half asleep and half awake, of her father’s difficulty.

When she awoke in the morning, her first thought was that Mrs Mayne was going to London to-day on some business with her trustees. Why not accompany her, and see if she could get Aquinas’ treatises? She had her mother’s trinkets, too sacred to be worn, but not too sacred to be used for such a purpose as this; she might leave them with the bookseller as some sort of guarantee.

She was thinking of this as she flitted round the breakfast-table, when her father entered, drooping, preoccupied. He kissed her, then went silently to the fire and warmed his hands.

‘Those boys not down yet?’

‘I expect they will be directly,’ said Griselda.

Then she asked her father, point-blank, whether she might accompany Mrs Mayne to town.

‘What for?’

He looked surprised.

‘Shopping.’

‘I never care for you to be away without me.’

Here the young men came in, followed by Jemima with the ham and eggs. Hugh looked older and thinner, perhaps because he had let hair and beard grow

as they would. Mervyn Bray was a short, awkwardly-made young man, with a large head for so poorly developed a body, with a white face carefully shaven, short thin hair carefully cut and smoothed, and watery blue eyes.

‘Ith a beauthiful morning, Mith Black,’ he vouchsafed, standing awkwardly behind his chair—he spoke with a lisp, and held both the Vicar and his daughter in considerable awe ; ‘and — dear me — thereth the pothman!’

He sat down as the old man with the leathern bag announced himself by rapping sharply at the Vicarage door with his staff, comforted by the fact that he would now escape notice. He was shy here than anywhere in his own particular little world.

There were several letters with coronets and monograms for himself ; one or two

more practical-looking envelopes directed to Blunt, and one letter for the Vicar.

Griselda was pouring out the tea, after one glance that assured her that this letter was not a disagreeable business communication.

If she could have seen the contents of the neat little envelope !

‘Will no amount of teaching make the present Vicar of Crowsfoot into an honourable man ? Ask yourself, sir, how you are treating your motherless daughter, allowing her, as you do, to reside under the same roof as young men who are known to be her admirers, without even an older lady to guarantee the commonest respectability.’

This note, or message, was carefully written in printed characters, on a slip of paper without watermark.

It was the first personal anonymous letter John Black had received. At first,

he could hardly believe the testimony of his own eyes. Then he suddenly smiled to himself.

‘Hal!’ he said. ‘Poor lad! It has not done him good, as I thought it would. But how could he? He cannot help being his mother’s son, of course. That coarse-minded woman!’

Nevertheless, the communication had its effect. As he put it carefully away among other papers in his pocket, he uneasily wondered whether others had had similar ideas,—whether, indeed, his presence only were sufficient shield for his darling’s purity and honour.

‘Did you not say you wanted to go to London with Mrs Mayne?’

‘Yes.’

‘By what train?’

‘The 10:20, I think.’

‘Then you had better make haste, and I will walk to the station with you.’

This brief conversation set Griselda wondering. Hugh Blunt was astonished; and, as he saw Griselda’s bright cheeks and her eagerness to get away, he grew grave.

He hung about the hall till she came down, dressed for travelling, and holding a small black bag.

‘Are you going to stay?’ he asked casually, as they walked out and stood on the doorstep, waiting for the Vicar.

‘Oh no!’

Again that flush as Griselda nervously clutched the handle of her bag.

‘Could I not, by any possibility, save you the journey? I should be so glad of a run up to town.’

‘Oh no; thank you all the same!’

‘Supposing I were to escort you and Mrs Mayne? Supposing that, when you reached the terminus, you saw me jumping out of the next carriage?’

Griselda looked at him with a sort of hunted look, as if she asked, ‘No peace—not even from you?’

While the Vicar came out, and both father and daughter went briskly up the road towards the station, Hugh uneasily asked himself what this meant.

Mr Black was generally so averse to his daughter’s going out alone. Hugh could scarcely indeed recall a time when he met her walking by herself since Goarshausen. Trusting her with kindly, good-natured, but unworldly Mrs Mayne, who suspected no one, could not be brought to believe ill of anybody, and said, ‘Poor soul, poor soul!’ when she heard of the hanging of

some notorious criminal. Trusting Griselda with a woman who had once refused to give a pickpocket in charge, although he had possessed himself of her purse containing twenty pounds !

‘It is not like the Vicar,’ he said to himself. He would be wretchedly uneasy till Griselda was safely home again. Hugh loved her more dearly than ever—perhaps all the more dearly because he buried that love so deep down in his heart. He had heard of the break with the Romaines. And, although he did not know it himself, he hoped that perhaps some day Griselda’s heart would dethrone its idol and incline towards him.

Mrs Mayne was at the station when Griselda walked in, and the Vicar, following, came up to her.

‘Can I have a word with you?’ he

asked. ‘Griselda will take the tickets—go, dear ;’ he had given Griselda money for her shopping as they walked along, little dreaming what that shopping was to be.

Mrs Mayne, red-faced, a little anxiously peeping into her bag, or pinching her reticule, or fumbling in her pockets to be quite sure she had not forgotten anything, said,—

‘Certainly, Mr Black! I am to have dear Griselda with me. Delightful!’

But her face changed when the Vicar drew her aside and abruptly spoke to her of a rumour he had heard that Griselda was too young to preside at the Vicarage while he received young men as pupils.

‘Goodness gracious, Mr Black! Whoever can have said that?’

‘Then it has never occurred to you?’

‘I should think not! Griselda of all girls!’

Then Mrs Mayne suddenly thought that, after all, there was something in this. All who knew Mr Black and Griselda could not somehow possibly think of them in the same hour with impropriety; and one of the pupils was Mr Hugh Blunt, that earnest, staid fellow who was such a favourite, and the other that poor little Mervyn Bray! Still outsiders might think and talk.

‘Do you think there is any admiration—at least, there must be for a beautiful girl like Griselda—I mean, do you think either of them is in love with her?’

‘Mrs Mayne, both these boys are gentlemen.’

‘Hush—here she comes! We must talk this over another time!’ said Mrs Mayne hurriedly, and rapidly changing the conversation.

But Griselda’s thoughts were fixed upon

her errand ; and she kissed her father, and helped Mrs Mayne arrange her parcels and cloak and umbrella in the carriage so calmly, in spite of the roar of the engine and the bustle there always was at Crowsfoot Station when a train condescended to stop there, that the doctor's wife felt quite angry with the author of that slur upon the Vicarage.

‘ If the Queen herself had said such a thing, I wouldn't forgive her, ’ indignantly thought the old lady, as — loyal subject that she was—the very strongest inward expression of her feelings she could give.

There were other passengers — three ladies—in the compartment the first half of the journey, so Griselda and her chaperon did not converse.

Griselda sat quietly gazing out upon the autumn landscape. In her—until lately—uneventful life, a railway journey was quite

an incident. And she loved the fair country she was born in ; she was never tired of watching the changes of the seasons.

Mrs Mayne was watching her. Once or twice Griselda, looking up, saw a new expression, a curious look on her old friend's face ; but she did not suspect the cause. The second or third time she blushed, and, leaning across, asked Mrs Mayne whether her hat was crooked, and on Mrs Mayne's ' Oh dear, no ! ' she asked if she were really tidy—she had hurried her dressing rather not to miss the train.

' My dear, I have never seen you untidy yet.'

Mrs Mayne spoke a little sharply. At that moment she felt annoyed with Nature for having made this young creature so beautiful. Her loveliness, placed as she was, with only the protec-

tion of 'that eccentric father of hers,' was literally but a drawback. It was of no use. 'If she were awkward and ugly, or even merely plain, life would really be much easier for her,' thought the doctor's wife.

A few stations farther on, their travelling-companions got out, and then Mrs Mayne began to talk, and to 'probe' Griselda with great wariness. She led the conversation gradually towards the subject of the vicarage, the Vicar, and his pupils.

After twenty minutes' cross-questioning, Mrs Mayne's conclusion was that, whatever might be the condition of the affections of Messrs Hugh Blunt and Mervyn Bray, Griselda was heart-whole so far as they were concerned.

'What shopping is it you are

going to do?’ asked the lady, after her mind was relieved so far. ‘My dear! Do you mean to say you have only come to run about London after some musty old book? Dear, dear! I shall pass half-a-dozen of those old library-shops that no one ever goes into, and who are always said to be buying ancient books at ridiculous prices, while you never hear of their selling anything. I could have got it for you directly.’

Griselda explained that this particular book might not be to be had at all.

Mrs Mayne shook her head. She had heard of Thomas Aquinas, but thought the name sounded Popish. Her Bible and Prayer-book were enough for her, she said aloud—inwardly adding that it would have been a good thing for Griselda if they had been enough for the Vicar.

Accustomed to have her own way to a certain extent, she then insisted, after she had concluded her City shopping, upon going to Paternoster Row.

‘My dear,’ she said in a tone which was intended to be conclusive, ‘if you want a book, Paternoster Row is the place to go to.’

So they spent a weary hour in that narrow way which eventually leads many a book to the only eternity letter-press can have, going in and out of the endless counting-houses through swinging doors, and their questioning being answered in various ways — gradations between excessive politeness and the reverse.

‘Never mind! Never say die!’ said Mrs Mayne, manfully dodging a heavy dray-cart which was struggling to get

out of the Row, and which, according to the driver of a hansom with a kicking horse, who looked as if he meant backing into an adjacent plate-glass window, 'hadn't got no business to be there at all.' 'As somebody says somewhere, it's dogged that does it. Let us be dogged, Griselda.'

'Yes, where it is of use,' said Griselda quite meekly. But she wanted to tell what she thought the truth, that they were wasting their time.

However, the hour in Paternoster Row was not altogether wasted, although, if Mrs Mayne and Griselda had not paused for that superfluous search for an ancient book among the world of new works, it is quite possible that that which came to pass that day might not have happened.

At the last counting-house they visited, a civil young clerk advised them to go to the great antiquarian book-seller, Mr Quatrefoil.

‘He knows — at least they say he knows—the title and contents of all the great works in the Museum, let alone the Bodleian and the Vatican,’ said the young man in the vague way of the general knower, as he bowed Griselda and her companion out, with a glance of admiration at the unconsciously beautiful girl.

‘Let us go, dear Mrs Mayne,’ said Griselda, so fervently that the good old lady hurried through a hasty luncheon at a pastrycook’s and drove off with her charge in a four-wheeled cab to the West End, where the learned bibliomaniac interviewed customers in a

quiet bookshop which looked like a great library in miniature.

Mr Quatrefoil, a grey-haired old gentleman, who wore blue spectacles—his eyes had been sorely tried by deciphering manuscript and staring too eagerly at thousands of title-pages—happened to come into the shop from his counting-house as Griselda and Mrs Mayne entered.

The literary antiquarian was the very reverse of a 'ladies' man,' but when he heard Griselda asking for Aquinas' treatise, he came forward, and somewhat coldly said,—

'There is no—good—translation.'

Griselda said eagerly she was seeking the original.

'It is difficult Latin,' said Mr Quatrefoil, with a slight smile.

‘Then you have the book?’

Griselda was breathless. Her cheek was flushed, her eyes sparkled.

This enthusiastic young lady was a strange customer. Mr Quatrefoil was puzzled, for this was before the advent of the strong-minded sex, of Newnham and Girton. He said he would see, but it would take some little time. If they were in a hurry, perhaps they would leave their address; he would let them know. He spoke with the most innocent look he could assume, knowing as he did—the sinner!—that within thirty seconds he might hold it in his hand, and went into his office—although, of course, the book was not there.

Griselda waited eagerly till he came back, and, looking at her rather oddly,

inquired if this book were required by an ordinary customer.

‘I know my father has bought books of you.’

Then Griselda told her story. Mr Quatrefoil listened with a new interest. When she came to the end, he said,—

‘Pray come into my office, Miss Black,’ so respectfully and kindly that Griselda felt hopeful.

‘Your father shall have the book for as long as he likes, with pleasure,’ he said, waiving Griselda’s offer of security with a ‘My dear young lady, certainly not!’ Then he stroked his beard thoughtfully, wondering if it would be prudent or right to tell Griselda what a curious coincidence her visit was.

‘What harm can there be?’ he thought. ‘The man said nothing about secrecy,

and he has gone over to the majority.' So he said, 'I had heard something of your father's book, Miss Black. But of course I hear of so many books that I should not have paid much attention to it had not my interest been claimed for the book by Professor Blackett, who is, I presume, a great friend of Mr Black's?'

Griselda shook her head.

'My father has his books,' she said doubtfully. 'But I have never heard him speak of the professor as an acquaintance even.'

'Dear me, well, that is odd!' Mr Quatrefoil seemed taken aback. 'It was only eight or nine days ago that Mr Blackett was here—sitting on the corner of that table—he is, or rather was, a lean, lanky sort of man, and had that habit of

perching himself high—and talking of your father's book. I can see him now, his arms folded, and he swaying himself backwards and forwards, a trick of his. Why, I thought he must be an intimate friend, or that, at the very least, Mr Black must have been a favourite pupil, such was the animation, the keen interested way in which he spoke. He even went so far as to ask me to read it. Then, after he had said good-bye, he came back to say, "Oh, Quatrefoil, if Black should come to you for reference-books, let him have them, will you?" Which meant asking a favour—the first time I have known him do such a thing, although he has been one of my best friends and patrons. Ah, poor fellow, I little thought those would be the very last words I should hear him speak!

‘He is surely not dead?’

‘A telegram was sent to our club from Cambridge last night to say he was found dead in his chair a few hours previously. Well, Miss Black, you see I have good foundation for my readiness to lend you the Thomas Aquinas.’

A few minutes later Griselda was on her way to join Mrs Mayne—wondering, but greatly pleased. She hugged that volume. She anticipated her father’s expression when he saw it with eager satisfaction.

Opening Messrs Rogers & Sandley’s door, she looked around. Ladies thronged the counters. There was a buzz of many voices.

‘Can I serve you, madam?’

Griselda explained that she was seeking an old lady—describing Mrs Mayne.

She did not know in which department she would be likely to find her. The shop-walker escorted her on a fruitless voyage of discovery. To all seeming, Mrs Mayne had left the shop.

‘Would the young lady wait?’

No. Griselda remembered that Mrs Mayne had told her in the morning that, should they by chance happen to miss each other, they were to meet at the bookstall at the railway-station. There were two trains—the 4.45 and the 6.20.

She might catch the 4.45. Of course Mrs Mayne must be at the station. She took a cab, and, arriving at the station, walked through. Plenty of people at the bookstall buying papers—but still no Mrs Mayne.

Presently the gates were shut, there

was a whistle, a slamming of doors, and the 4.45 was gone.

Nearly two hours to wait ! How should she spend the time ? She walked up and down and about for a time, till people began to stare at her, and she saw two porters look at her, then at each other, and laugh. Then she went into the waiting-room. But it was full and stuffy ; so out she went again, and came upon a little recess in a corner where there was a bench. Here she sat, and, opening the old volume, began to read. The Latin was old and crabbed and strange. But Griselda had inherited the taste for research and the spirit of literary venture from her father. She forgot her journey, Mrs Mayne, everything. She might have been hundreds of miles away from the noisy, busy railway station.

She was recalled by hearing her name spoken in a husky whisper. She glanced up, but she saw no one. It must have been fancy, she thought, or there might be plenty of other girls that were named Griselda.

But, all the same, the reading spell was broken. She closed the precious book, and amused herself watching the men beginning to light the lamps. Looking at the clock, she saw it was drawing nearer the time of departure. Should she not go and see if Mrs Mayne were at the trysting-place?

She rose—when some one clutched her arm.

She gave a little shriek of fright, then turned.

It was Hal! At first she hardly knew him. He was pale; but it was not that

which altered him. It was the expression of his face which had changed him. He used to look careless, triumphant, defiant, through his smiles. Now he looked—well, the word ‘wicked’ flashed through Griselda’s mind. Common-place greetings died on her lips. She stared at him, her eyes wet with grief and love.

He looked her over coolly, almost absently. Then he asked whom she expected.

She stammered out about losing Mrs Mayne, and waiting for the 6.20 train, somewhat incoherently.

He stood twisting his moustache, as if he hardly heard. Then he offered her his arm. Griselda drew back.

‘Come with me,’ he said.

‘Oh, but I cannot—I must not!’ she said. ‘Let us talk here, if you want to talk to me.’

He sneered slightly, but merely said ‘Come!’ more impatiently.

Griselda looked round and about hopelessly, helplessly; and then, as if she were in a dream or mesmerised, she found herself walking out of the station and into the London streets with Hal Romaine.

Hal Romaine led Griselda silently but quickly out into the street. It had been raining. The lamps were reflected on the wet pavement. There was the increased bustle and hurry that follows a shower. Hal made his way among the clusters of umbrellas, hailed a hansom, then said to Griselda,—

‘Will you get in, if you please?’

For one moment she hesitated. Then again the feeling of submission was uppermost, and presently she was driving away with Hal, whither she could not tell.

She glanced at him timidly from time to time. But he sat sternly silent with folded arms. At last she ventured to say pleadingly,—

‘Where are you taking me to? You will take me back in time for the 6.20 train, will you not? Mrs Mayne will be so frightened!’

He laughed slightly.

‘Oh, certainly!’ he said. ‘Your anxiety about Mrs Mayne is superfluous, I can assure you. The little I have to say will take but a short time in saying.’

He opened the little trap-door and gave some directions to the driver, while Griselda wondered—wondered what had happened to change the impetuous, excitable Hal, whose storms of passion had even admitted of gleams of sun-

shine, into this gloomy, sarcastic young man.

She was nerving herself for an unpleasant interview when the cab drew up at a flight of wide steps; and, glancing through the window at her right, she saw the rows of pillars, the porticoes and façades, the grand blackened stone pile surmounted by the great dome—St Paul's.

Hal sprang out, paid the driver, held out his hand peremptorily, and Griselda alighted. What was he bringing her here for? It was a side-entrance. One of the cathedral doors stood half open. No one was on the steps, none were passing in and out.

Hal offered her his arm, they ascended the flight, he opened the inner baize door for her to pass, and Griselda stood

in the vast solemn building, where the sound and rays of light that travel in seem captured, never again to know the outer air and life.

Strange to say, she had not been here before. John Black had not cared to take his little daughter with him when he paid his brief, busy visits to the metropolis.

There was to be evening service later on. Some of the lamps were lighted. There were moving figures in the chancel.

‘Why did you bring me here?’

Griselda, reassured by the passive protection of the place, grew braver. She spoke to Hal coldly, as he spoke to her, and held her Thomas Aquinas tightly. Hal might try her, might make her suffer; but she determined

not to forget her father's book of reference, not to be 'off guard' and to lose it.

‘What book is that?’

Griselda opened the volume at the title-page. Hal stooped and glanced at it, then drew himself up contemptuously. Since that scene at Goarshausen, he had disliked and tormented his parents. He had taken a savage pleasure in exaggerating the dissipation into which he had undoubtedly plunged, to his mother. Her tears and prayers had merely augmented his enjoyment of his revenge—that evil passion inherent in most human natures, especially in spoilt human natures. Now he was trying to hate Griselda's father. But this was more difficult, for he respected him deeply, and Hal the ill-regulated

could not really love where he could not respect. However, he sarcastically said,—

‘Then Mr Black is still floundering in feeble Atheism? Does he think St Thomas will pull him out?’

Griselda made no reply.

Hal waited for her to reply. But Griselda stood, motionless as one of the sculptured figures on the monuments that loomed blackly in the dimness. Then there came a wailing musical sound as if from afar, and the great organ began to play, a simple hymn that was to be sung at the coming service, played softly through by the organist. It touched Griselda, but it aggravated Hal, who had a sense of wrong done, of sin committed, who had no honoured and respected con-

science as his staff, shield, belt—that which a moral warrior wants. He said to her, almost savagely,—

‘You asked me why I brought you here. Because I fancied, in spite of your vile behaviour to me, that you had enough reverence left not to tell lies here.’

‘What lies have I ever told you, Hal?’ she asked, in an undertone.

‘Your conduct proves that you have never told me anything else.’

‘What conduct?’

‘First, accepting me; then throwing me over at once, without a look or a word, in the most heartless manner I ever heard of; then rushing into the arms of your former lover, Hugh Blunt—’

‘Hal!’ Griselda drew herself up,

and her eyes flashed. 'I cannot hear your evil thoughts in a church.' And she was moving to the door, when he — somewhat taken aback by the first wrath—and he knew well enough justifiable wrath—of the girl he loved—went quickly after and caught her hand.

'Come and sit down, and we will talk quietly. Griselda' — he looked piteously at her.

'If I do, will you say a little prayer first?'

'Griselda, forgive me!'

'I meant a real prayer. Oh, Hal,' she said suddenly, forgetting all but that this was her dearest, her adored, who made the light of her life, and for whose loss she had been sorrowing each day, each hour, almost every minute, 'if it had not been for the

mercy of God, I could not have borne leaving you! I had to—it was right—I knew God would help me; but if you could know how I have missed you since Goarshausen—how I have pined, and longed, and wearied just to see you, even without your seeing me—how I have loathed everyone and everything—how I was sorry when I woke up in the morning, because there was another day to work through, and how I groaned when the work was done, because there was the long dreary night, when I tossed or turned or was tormented by cruel dreams! Oh, Hal, after all that, how can you be unkind?’

Her voice faltered. She bent forward to hide her emotion. Great tears welled up and overflowed. Hal, remorseful and gentle once more, made

her seat herself on one of the chairs; then—his manner changed and softened—he pleaded for himself.

‘Griselda, darling, forgive me!’ he began.

Then he made a full confession, almost without reserve, only too certain of his pardon. His life since their parting had been a disgraceful episode in his career; Griselda, innocent as she was, felt that. He had accompanied his family back as far as Calais, where, at the last moment, he announced his intention of starting for Paris alone.

‘They were aghast,’ he said. ‘But I think my mother consoled herself with the idea that even Paris was better than England—where she had taken the trouble to find out that you already were. I had of course been over to

Paris before — several times — but not in the devilish humour I was in then. Well, some fellows I knew were there—a fast lot—even for the —th, which is considered a fast regiment. I lived their life, which is saying much. I lived their life, but could not feel as they profess to feel—that there is no such thing as Good anywhere. Wherever I went, whatever I did, in the wildest, noisiest scenes—or alone and wretched in the dead of the night—my memory was haunted by you—you in the side-chapel of the old cathedral—you pitying that poor old dog—you as I found you at the top of that hill—you promising to be my wife—you rushing away from me when my mother behaved so disgracefully—your face, your touch, your voice. I could not stand it; I left

again suddenly for London. London was a little better. I was getting more patient when my mother announced to me that she had heard you were re-engaged to a Mr Blunt. "I understood there was a disagreement," she said, "but that Miss Black's father wisely asked Mr Blunt to overlook his daughter's conduct. If she will only keep straight now, she has a fair chance of leading a respectable life." I won't tell you about the row we had. I am ashamed of it. But she has paid for that speech handsomely. She is ill now; they have taken her to Bournemouth.'

'Don't tell me any more!' Griselda's heart was in her mouth. And this was her doing! 'But how could you believe me to be bad—false—horrible?'—with a shudder. 'Did I not promise you

that, if I could not marry you'—she looked at him with a world of love in her earnest eyes—'I would never marry anyone else?'

'It is a common thing for women to promise'—scornfully.

'But I am not a woman—I am only a girl,' said Griselda earnestly. 'And that reminds me — you won't understand what my worst torment has been, perhaps. Well, it was thinking that I was a plain ordinary country girl, just dressed anyhow, the best way I could; but that you were among all the beautiful ladies—beings I have often imagined—tall, small-waisted, with flowing silk or satin dresses, and their hair beautifully done up, and wearing necklets and rings and bracelets. Oh, when I thought of those, I was unhappy!'

‘You had no faith in me, then?’

‘Hal!’

An irrepressible smile glinted upon both their young faces. The strained, ugly look had already left Hal’s countenance.

‘Now, Griselda, you know what jealousy means!’

‘Have you been jealous?’ whispered Griselda. ‘Oh dear, oh dear, if I had only known that, I would have told you everything at once!’

‘What—everything?’

‘That—everything—when I cannot see you—is—hateful.’

‘My darling, we must understand each other, once and for all,’ said Hal. ‘We are promised to each other, and as soon as circumstances will permit, you and I will be husband and wife. Meanwhile,

I have only one favour to ask you. Be firm with your father, and demand that he shall send those young-men pupils of his away. You cannot understand, nor do I wish you to understand, why I insist upon this. But I can tell you this much: If your father were not a self-absorbed, opinionated man — you would not be the lady of the house where two strange young men are two of the small family of four.'

Then he told Griselda that people who studied conventionalities had talked about the Vicar's neglect of her. Now that he was softened, comforted, that Griselda was true and pure-hearted, still his ideal woman, he was gentler, and said nothing absolutely to wound her feelings. Still, while he talked, she felt that something must be done, and a

vague idea of what she might do arose in her mind. She determined to consult Mrs Mayne.

That lady had proceeded to the draper's, and had partly got through her shopping, when she saw an old friend just leaving the shop by another door—a former schoolfellow she had an affection for, but had not seen for years. She stood just outside talking to her, and thus missed Griselda. As time went on, she thought her charge was a long time at Mr Quatrefoil's inquiring for Aquinas' treatise, so she ordered her purchases to be securely packed and she went to Quatrefoil's, which was but a few doors from the great emporium. The bookseller himself was out; but his assistant told her that the young lady left 'nearly an hour ago.'

Mrs Mayne could hardly believe this, her arrangement with Griselda that the latter should join her at the draper's was so clear. She felt puzzled. Returning to the shop, she found on inquiry that Griselda had been there. It was evident that they had missed each other. 'She is waiting for me at the station,' thought Mrs Mayne, and thither she proceeded in a cab; with her purchases. When she did not see Griselda waiting at the bookstall, she thought she must be in the waiting-room; and, while she was going from one to the other, Hal had succeeded in persuading the girl whose love was so strong that she could not resist him to leave the station for a while with him.

If Mrs Mayne could have known this! Without the knowledge, she was fidgety

and anxious enough. Where could the girl be? Griselda was behaving so unlike Griselda. Poor Mrs Mayne, in her distracted frame of mind, was a perfect nuisance to the officials. She implored the ticket-collectors to remember if a young lady answering to Griselda's description had started by the 4.45 train. She cross-questioned all the porters, and made the life of the young man who served newspapers at the bookstall a perfect burden to him. Whispers went about that the old lady was an escaped lunatic, with a delusion, and the glances that followed her became so unpleasant to the poor doctor's wife that she had just given her search up in despair, and had seated herself on the very bench which Griselda had occupied shortly before, when, looking across the station,

she saw the young lady walk calmly in on the arm of a young man.

‘Oh!’

Words could not describe that ‘oh’ of Mrs Mayne’s. She rubbed her eyes, hurried up to the couple who were going towards the bookstall, and positively clutched at Griselda’s arm.

Hal turned, and, seeing who it was, Mrs Mayne said, ‘Oh!’ again, and for a moment or two was speechless.

Then she said, ‘Well, Griselda!’ and her tone meant much. Hal gave a short account of their meeting and visit to St Paul’s, ending with,—

‘It is too strange not to be true, Mrs Mayne! Fancy, that our meeting came about by a chance in a million. I was carrying this cane, not an umbrella. It began to rain. I had a new

hat. I actually tossed up whether I should take a hansom or wait in the station, and chance decided I should wait.'

Mrs Mayne could not help thinking her credulity was somewhat hardly taxed. Still, she did not really doubt the veracity of either of the young people. She had always liked Hal Romaine—and who could doubt Griselda who had known her, as Mrs Mayne had—ever since she was born?

So she accepted the situation, heard Griselda's explanation, and allowed Hal to carry her small parcels and to summon a porter for the larger ones, to find them a compartment, to settle them comfortably therein, and to wait until the train started, when he stood, lifting his hat from his curly head, and

fixing his eyes upon Griselda with so wistful, tender, and passionate a gaze, that Mrs Mayne remembered her young days and felt quite touched.

‘Poor young things!’ she thought. But she speedily repressed her overflow of sympathy. Griselda was a motherless girl, with a pedantic father, who ‘knew about as much of the world as a baby.’ She was, moreover, under her own guardianship, and this meeting had come about while she was responsible. The old lady had gathered somewhat from Griselda of the Goarshausen business. But she was not rightly in possession of the facts.

‘My dear,’ she said to Griselda, kindly but sternly, as soon as they were fairly on their journey homewards, ‘I am seriously concerned about this meeting of

yours with Mr Romaine. In fact, I hardly know what I ought to do about it. I must consult the Doctor this very night.'

Then Griselda began from the beginning and told her all, from the romantic childish affection which Mrs Mayne remembered well—she fancied she could see the pretty boy Hal now—that day years ago when he came and talked about Griselda to her,—to the interview but an hour ago in St Paul's, which had left them more closely bound to each other than they had as yet been.

Mrs Mayne's heart bid fair to bias her judgment. It was all so romantic, the love between these handsome young people. Then Griselda told her tale so artlessly, and looked so sweet, and in

the background there was Feather's Court, the title, the town-house, and the other estates. Surely a marriage such as this might rank among the 'marriages made in heaven'! Then she called herself to order. Although she did not like Sir Hubert and Lady Romaine, and had much fault to find with the Vicar, her first duty was to the parents.

'I wish you both happiness together with my whole heart,' she said. 'But, my dear, that happiness cannot be unless Sir Hubert and Lady Romaine relent.'

Griselda agreed with her. Then she told her of Hal's dislike to the present arrangements at the vicarage.

Mrs Mayne admitted that dislike to be very natural. Still, she could not see what Griselda was to do.

Then the girl confided her idea to her old friend.

‘I thought perhaps Jemima could manage for them, with a girl under her,’ she suggested. ‘And I could take a resident governess’s situation—to teach young boys. I know I could prepare them for school thoroughly. And I think I understand boys.’

‘You have had experience enough, I am sure, with those brothers of yours,’ said Mrs Mayne, somewhat taken aback. ‘But, my dear, if you were really to do this, I fear it would be a lasting stumbling-block in the way of marrying into the Romaine family. Lady Romaine might be brought to acknowledge a clergyman’s daughter as her daughter-in-law, but a governess! Never!’

‘It cannot be helped.’

‘Well, I will think it over. Go on as usual for a few days, Griselda ; then come up to tea with me, and we will talk it over.’

The Doctor and his wife sat up very late that night talking of the Blacks’ affairs. Meanwhile, Griselda had had the delight of seeing her father greatly pleased with the book she had brought. He was interested to hear that the professor, so lately dead, had interested himself so deeply in his writings.

‘Poor fellow,’ he said ; ‘I should liked to have thanked him ! What an eccentric man he was !’

He told Griselda of the efforts he had made, and others had made, for him to meet and converse with the celebrated Professor Blackett, and how curiously and signally those efforts had failed.

Then, every available moment, John Black was at work upon his new book. It was his daughter's triumph to find the required quotation. Griselda was hard at work those next days, but the work did not seem hard. The sight of her beloved betrothed husband, his loving words and looks, had been new life to her. Her faith and trust in him were complete. Sometimes she said to herself, 'I am too happy, too blest.' After that came a morning that the Vicar received a curious letter from Messrs Everest & Everest. He said nothing to Griselda at the breakfast-table. But, later on, he came to her in the garden, where she was trailing some late convolvulus on a wire basket, and asked her what she thought of it. The letter ran as follows :—

‘DEAR SIR,—If you will favour us with an interview at your earliest convenience, to discuss matters relating to yourself and to your sons and daughter, which are of the utmost importance, you will greatly oblige,—Your most obedient servants,

‘EVEREST & EVEREST.’

‘What can it mean?’ said the Vicar, half to himself, half to Griselda.

‘Perhaps’—she hesitated a little—‘the bishop has felt sorry for being so—so—intolerant, and wishes you to begin preaching again—no, don’t shake your head, you dear father, and don’t look so sad.’ She clung to him. ‘Sometimes I feel almost sure that some great good is going to happen to you—that it must come sooner or later. I did so the other day, when I was in St Paul’s, and the organ was play-

ing, and the hymn reminded me of you—so true—so firm—so good—’

‘St Paul’s! Did Mrs Mayne take you to St Paul’s?’

Griselda told her father about her meeting with Hal.

‘There was no harm?’ she added, slightly alarmed, for he looked grave and troubled.

‘No harm,’ he said; ‘but I am sorry—sorry—oh, Griselda, child,’ he said, with sudden passion, ‘you are all I have now—you seem to be more *hers* than the boys! You are like her too, I know you are, in heart and soul, my darling; and to think of a word against you being said! I cannot bear it! And I am so tied and bound,’ he went on, shaking aside his shaggy grey hair, and stroking his brow with his thin hand. ‘I cannot take care

of you as I would. That illness—that ill-success — our poverty — they are so many drags upon each step I take, so many chains upon my hands. Griselda, a few nights before your mother died I had a dream. I dreamt I saw a big white lily and a tiny one on the same stalk, and as I looked at them, the big lily withered and shrivelled as if it had been burnt, and I had only the tiny one left. It was prophetic, but not prophetic of how I should grow to love and depend upon my white blossom !’ He took her face tenderly between his hands. ‘Nor did it prophesy that I should first be careless, worse than careless. Child, can you forgive me?’ he said, in a slow dull way ; and there was a look of anguish in his eyes which made her heart ache. ‘Can you forgive me for having once, in my misery, thought that—’

He turned away. He could not say it, this confession which had so often risen to his lips. His remorse for having shunned the child *Griselda* as the innocent and indirect cause of her mother's death had been frequent and cruel.

‘Father’—she could not bear to hear him speak thus —‘ I know ; it was so natural ! How could you help it ? If I had not been born, she might not have died. I cannot talk about forgiving you, for I have such a feeling you have never done wrong.’

‘And I to-day feel as if I were the greatest sinner in the whole world,’ said John Black, his arms falling at his sides. ‘What this presentiment of some blow—some sudden ending to this life of ours, with nothing beyond—means to-day, I cannot tell ; but there it is, weighing me

down. I once had a terrible interview with those Evérests, Griselda! I was a very young man, and I had lived as worse than an orphan—for at least orphans knew where their parents' bodies rest, and can stand by their graves and hope to meet them again—but no one could ever tell me who I was, or who it was that gave me my daily bread till I could earn it for myself. Well, I went to those lawyers and asked them boldly, "Who am I?" Men? They were as stone. Could they be flesh and blood; could they be husbands with wives clinging to them, fathers with children babbling to them and climbing about their knees? They nearly broke my spirit and crushed my life; my child, they absolutely refused to tell me one word; they sent me out into the world—utterly alone.'

It was the first time he had shown such emotion to Griselda—the first time he had spoken to her of his boyhood, his life. She bent her head, and, raising his hand, reverently kissed it ; she could not speak.

‘ I dread to-day,’ he went on, with a shuddering sob. ‘ Can it be because I am physically weak ? I am a coward. I cannot meet this blow—I fear it.’

‘ Darling !’ cried Griselda, as with a sudden inspiration seizing his hand and looking brightly into his face, ‘ I know, I am sure this is only good news ! Oh, do believe me—what else could it be ? Why should they write about Tom and Harry and me ; and use the word “ important ? ” And, even if it were not altogether good news, you have us all to love you and stick by you, and do every mortal possible thing to make you bear

it. There, you must soon be going, or you will have to wait till the two o'clock train, and the offices will be shut before you get there ;' and she hurried him into the house and brushed his coat, and hung about him tenderly ; then, after he said good-bye, stood smiling, and waving her hand till he turned the corner of the lane, and she saw him no more.

Then she felt suddenly lonesome and miserable. Her spirits fell ; there had been something in John Black's manner to-day which his daughter had never—sensitive to the slightest variation in her father's looks, tones, and attitudes—noticed before.

'Will—something—happen ?' she asked herself, feeling dazed and strange.

At that moment she saw Hugh Blunt hastening up the lane. When he saw her, he ran, to save her from waiting at the door.



CHAPTER VI.

‘**W**HAT is wrong?’ blurted out Hugh Blunt to Griselda. ‘Your father met me just now—stopped a moment—shook my hand—was going to speak—then turned away, and went off with his fastest stride. It is—bad news?’

‘It is—everything,’ said Griselda, leaning against the parlour door. ‘Or—excuse me—I am not fit to talk.’

Her voice faltered, and she turned away her head.

‘Nonsense!’ said Hugh, in a bantering

tone, though he sympathised with her deeply. 'Come, let me hear all about it.'

Then he simply took her hand and led her into the parlour, closed the door, and stirred the logs on the hearth, which were smouldering into grey ashes. After which he stood on the hearthrug, and in a way peculiarly his own contrived to find out what he wanted to know, and a little more—for, unnerved as Griselda was, she somehow mentioned her intention to leave home and to take a situation as governess.

'What?' cried Hugh, surprised into vehemence. 'You—leave home—leave us—what does it mean? Griselda, are we—is poor Bray—or am I—hateful to you? If so, it is we who ought to leave—not you. Oh, this cannot be serious! Some one has put this nonsensical notion into your head. It cannot be yours! Tell me—'

He walked uneasily to the window, and back to the fireplace—uneasily, because he felt certain that there was something unpleasant at the root of this unexpected whim of the girl he so fondly loved.

‘No one put the idea into my head,’ said Griselda. ‘It came there quite by itself, and I mean it to stay.’

‘You mean to leave—your father?’

‘I mean to give my idea consideration and to discuss it.’

‘With your father, of course?’

‘No; with Mrs Mayne. I am going to tea with her this afternoon.’

‘You—with your knowledge—are going to be led by that good-natured old lady, who is the embodiment of narrow Crows-foot opinions! What can have happened to bring about this?’

‘Nothing but facts.’

Hugh was disturbed, worried. Of course, if Griselda had not been the mainspring of his feelings, thoughts, and actions, he might have regretted had she gone into the world as a governess, but would scarcely have cared. But, as he loved her, he was stung to the quick.

‘Let me speak to you,’ he began, in a low earnest voice, going towards the little red sofa where she was sitting, her elbow on the sofa-arm, her head supported by her hand. ‘Let me—’

‘No, no!’ Griselda, detecting something that reminded her of Hugh as he was at Goarshausen, sprung up, her cheeks rosy red. ‘Please not; do you know I have ever so much to do? We dine early, as usual, and I am going to tea with Mrs Mayne, and poor Jemima will not “get through,” as she calls it;’ and,

taking her key-basket, she abruptly left him.

Hugh thought, rapidly and decisively.

‘This shall not be,’ he said to himself. ‘I must speak. When she knows how utterly unworthy of her he is—how the very fact that such a fellow dared to make love to her blemishes her sweet purity—surely she will be persuaded, if not to care for me, at least to let me care for and protect her.’

He made some resolutions, then quietly joined Mervyn Bray, who was at work, stupefying himself with a seemingly insoluble problem, in the little sitting-room under the sloping roof upstairs.

At the early dinner Hugh was quiet and helpful, but showed no trace of the morning’s mental disturbance. Griselda had leisurely dressed, had started, and had

nearly reached the cross-roads at the end of the vicarage lane, when she heard quick footsteps behind her. It was Hugh. As he came up, he said,

‘I will walk with you to Mrs Mayne’s.’

Griselda halted in consternation.

‘Oh, but you can’t!’ she said.

‘Why not?’

She looked this way and that.

‘You see, Mrs Mayne does not exactly expect you. I mean, she has not asked you to tea to-day, although I am sure she will be delighted to see you any other day you choose to go.’

‘I only meant to accompany you to the door.’

‘But that means going through the village.’

‘I have been through the village with you often before.’

‘Yes,’ began Griselda; then she reddened, and stammered out, ‘but not—not without Mr Bray—or my father—or both.’

‘Why this sudden prudery? I can call it nothing else.’

‘I have reasons—or rather a reason—which I do not intend to tell you.’

‘That is very wrong — it is cruel, Griselda!’ said Hugh warmly. ‘After all these months that I have lived under your father’s roof—after our being together as we were abroad—after the numbers of times that I have walked to church or to the school with you—you suddenly are capricious, and take away a simple privilege for nothing at all! It is unworthy of you.’

‘Come, then, if you please,’ said Griselda.

At first he walked by her side in silence ; but then he began to speak. He would not be stayed ; he would have his say out. He told her of his love. He promised her long unbroken happiness if she would promise to be his wife some day. He assured her of a warm welcome from ‘his people’—this passion made him eloquent. Griselda’s heart beat faintly—her face was chill—she was pale—she could not check that torrent of words.

‘Don’t!’ she feebly said at last. ‘I cannot bear it ;’ and she looked as if she would faint. One stormy interview after another seemed to overwhelm her.

‘You are obdurate? You steadily set yourself against me, then?’ said Hugh, with rising anger. ‘All my love—all my devotion—go for nothing!’

‘Do not say that,’ dear friend,’ said Griselda, supporting herself against a tree, and looking pleadingly at him. ‘Do you think I am ungrateful? Do you think I have not seen and known how good, how thoughtful you have been for us? But’—she looked down, her voice faltered—she was so unused to speak of the one dominant presence in her mind—‘you remember what I told you at Goarshausen? I may not, indeed most likely I never shall, marry—but I—could never—marry—anyone—but—Hal.’

Hugh hesitated. He looked at the slight graceful creature, so modest, so gentle, who spoke of reckless—in his opinion, bad—Hal Romaine half with awe, as if she talked of some ineffably sacred subject. He battled with his anger and disgust. He struggled to feel

pity, sympathy. But a stern sensation rose and got the ascendancy—a dogged determination to enlighten Griselda. It was not really rivalry or any mean feeling which made him speak out, and tell the girl whose ideal was Hal Romaine of what clay her idol was made; how he had been the fastest youth among a fast set of young fellows, first and foremost in any devilry; how the worst conduct which could be attributed to a young man who was not openly going to perdition had been attributed to him; how, worst of all, since she had given him her maiden affection at Goarshausen, he had returned to wallow in the mire with redoubled carelessness as to past, present, and future. It was justice—unscrupulous justice, perhaps, but still justice to himself, to her, to her father—to

tell his story, which was true in a manner in all its naked ugliness.

When he stopped, he felt he had said too much. He had talked to this girl as if she were a man; but what was to be done? He could not gloss over vice.

He looked eagerly at Griselda. At last, at last he had opened her eyes!

But Griselda merely said very quietly, 'Thank you, Mr Blunt. Please leave me'—as if they had been discussing the most ordinary question.

She had listened, and she had heard. But Hal had anticipated his enemy by his free confession; therefore Griselda felt that he was injured by Hugh Blunt, that she was his natural champion, and that the prodigal who morally flung himself at her feet a few days since in the old church was as far superior to mali-

cious and maligning Hugh Blunt as the Publican was to the Pharisee.

Before Blunt had rallied from his astonishment, she had left him, and was many yards along the lane.

He stood gazing after her, almost stupefied. He had not anticipated this. He could not understand how one so pure could love one so vile.

‘Why are fellows of that sort born?’ he asked himself, with sudden rage. ‘Of no use, but to torment, to drag others down to their miserable level—to pollute their womankind—for they degrade them to the level of carrion hovering about garbage—vice is spiritual garbage—they are like that toad,’ he went on, turning round, and pursuing a path across a corn-field which led to a copse, and pushing a misshapen green and yellow toad into the

ditch with his stick. 'What are those noisome creatures for in the economy of nature?'

He looked vaguely about, as if for an answer. The clear autumn sky was patched with sunlit clouds; the gold and brown leaves went fluttering down, as if they meant to play with their withered brethren that lay in heaps about the grassy hedgerows rather than to die. A field-mouse flashed along and fled into a hole; then, as Hugh trod the stubble, a covey of partridges flew up with a whirr. Nature was smiling about him, and he saw her not. For she—and natures such as his,—who reason, calculate, and govern,—are scarcely at one. The wild, passionate, loving, and repentant are the children of Nature, who is all furious storm, raving and raging, casting her children

wildly hither and thither, hunting them from her—even to death—one day ; while the next she will be all stillness and sunshine, drawing up the beaten flowers, coaxing the storm-ridden creatures back to bask upon her warm bosom, never consistent in her moods except in their inconsistency.

Hugh went on to the copse, and there he flung himself upon the grass under the nut-trees, and gave himself up to anxious thought. Tiny insects crept in and out of the grass ; the rabbits were scudding about a green bank a little distance away ; doves cooed now and then. It was so still he could hear the heavy breathing of a cart-horse munching in a grassfield beyond the hedge.

He thought—for long. Then he rose, shook himself free of fallen leaves and

twigs, and went away, sternly but securely comforted by a long course of reasoning.

If, he considered—if he waited and hoped, and was constant in the *rôle* of faithfully devoted pupil to the Vicar and brotherly friend to Griselda—he would tire out circumstances. The Romaine complications must come to an end, and the continued resistance of Sir Hubert and Lady Romaine would at last kill Hal's passion for Griselda, who would then be free.

He calculated for all continuing on the same level. Chances, as we term sudden occurrences that shake and overthrow all humanity's judgments of what will be met with to-morrow or any to-morrow in the future,—he forgot. Therefore he was as one tossing on the sea without a compass.

He went home to be reproached by Mervyn Bray for having forgotten his promise that they two should take a long walk together.

‘Well, it is not too late now,’ he said.

So they started out, went to the nearest hill of the chain which was the background to Feather’s Court, watched a beautiful golden autumn sunset, and returned in the gloaming.

‘We might meet the Vicar, if we went back by the station,’ said Hugh, glancing at his watch by the light of the full moon, as they passed the first cottage of the straggling village of Crows-foot. ‘The 6.20 will not be so very long now.’

Bray assented; so they turned down the station-lane. Here there was some excitement going on. Mothers with

babies in their arms and young children clinging to their skirts, were standing about in groups, all looking in one direction. Men and boys were running and shouting.

‘Fire!’ suggested Mervyn Bray, whose ideas were somewhat straggling, especially when he was fatigued—and he was more than that now; after pounding along the roads and rushing up and downhill with Hugh, he was positively footsore.

‘The sky looks so red, doesn’t it, old man?’ said Hugh sarcastically. He was not particular as to his sayings when he was alone with good-natured Bray. ‘No; most probably it is a row. There is not the slightest doubt that, since the Vicar has left off lecturing in the schoolroom as well as

preaching, those wretched public-houses have done double business.'

They walked quickly down the lane. If there really were a row, it was on the station platform. There was a surging crowd there. The murmur could be heard some distance away.

'A prize-fight, no doubt,' said Bray, with pride at his brilliant inspiration.

But just then they reached the station, and a man rushed out, wild, ghastly, clutching madly at his hair, and shrieking,—

'My only girl—my only girl!'

'Stop him, stop him; he will kill himself!' shouted a man and some women, rushing after him.

The pursued and the pursuers went by like a whirlwind. Bray gave a curious little cry; he was frightened. Hugh stood still and said hoarsely,—

‘No, no ; it is some accident !’

The little booking-office was full. The policeman was carried hither and thither, vaguely, by the crowd. He was powerless. Hugh heard sobbing and short sad cries on the platform beyond. There was a continuous low moan, such as the storm-wind utters in a pine-forest. Everyone vociferated, but no one took notice of any other. It might have been a gathering of the inmates of some lunatic asylum. But suddenly the door of the waiting-room opened, sending the people near reeling back among the crowd, and Doctor Mayne came out with the station-master, who was blanched and trembling.

Hugh gave a vigorous push, and made his way to their side.

‘The 6.20 run into by the express, and

smashed,' said the station-master. 'If we could only clear the station! Nothing can be done till they will move.'

Hugh heard passively, as if in some awful dream. Doctor Mayne clutched his arm.

'It has been telegraphed a quarter of an hour,' he said, 'and look at the scene now—what shall we do? There is poor Sir Hubert lying there in the waiting-room; he came in the dog-cart to meet his son; we sent it off to Armchurch for Doctor Strong there. He fainted. I fear it is slight apoplexy.'

'Sir — Hubert — Romaine?' Hugh spoke strangely, as if he were drugged.

'Yes—oh, poor fellow—poor Hal! He was in the train expected.'

'Oh—but—my God!—the Vicar!' cried Hugh distractedly.

‘Hush, hush!’ Doctor Mayne had seemed to live ten years in those last minutes. The accident and its impending horrors were familiar to him, as if he had known nothing but all this for months. ‘Hush! There she comes!’

Hugh turned, and saw Griselda, who came in, pale, staggering, as one buried alive and released, into the outer air.

Hugh made one step towards her, reeled, and leant back against the wall. It was the worst moment of his life.





CHAPTER VII.

THE Vicar had gone on to London, still in depressed spirits. Yet London had seldom looked to such advantage as on this bright, clear autumn day. Last week's rain had dashed the pavements white. Pure sunshine lay upon the freshened roofs, and glinted on the fast-falling foliage of the imprisoned trees with the blackened trunks that grew in the old City churchyards. The men thronging the streets seemed to walk more lightly, for a good two-thirds of the busy crowd had just returned invigorated

by their annual holiday. Lincoln's Inn Fields was unusually quiet. The many windows, whose uncurtained, unblinded condition meant offices on every floor, had always seemed to look blank and discouraging to John Black, perhaps because hereabouts was the one great mystery of his life, locked up, it might be, in some old deed-box in Messrs Everests' safes, or perhaps in the legal minds of those gentlemen only. To-day, the staid, empty look of the houses oppressed him more than ever. He walked round the square before he mounted the narrow flight of stone steps leading to Messrs Everests' office, thinking of that day when he went to them to ask for a monetary advance, soon after Doctor Mayne had told him that his beloved wife must shortly die. Those practical business

men had proposed an arrangement to him then which seemed to him most unlawful-like—to advance him money without charging him interest, this money to be paid back when convenient to himself, and not to affect his three thousand pounds which they had invested for him, the interest of which he was to continue to draw as usual. He had never understood that. Now they no longer had any money of his, for, after insisting a few years ago upon refunding the sum they had so freely and generously lent him, he had withdrawn and used the little capital he had left—and not a shilling of it remained.

Presently he chided himself for his ‘cowardice,’ and went into the clerk’s office.

He was immediately taken upstairs into the great gaunt room. Here the lanky

Mr Walter Everest and his smaller but senior brother and partner, Mr Henry, were standing talking near the fireplace to a bland old gentleman with white hair, dressed in deep mourning, who, saluting them with subdued but smiling deference, immediately bowed himself out when he saw the Vicar. Evidently his interview with these representatives of the well-known firm had been by no means an unpleasant one.

The brothers turned, and shook hands with John Black.

‘Be seated, I beg,’ said Mr Henry. ‘I hope you have half-an-hour to spare?’

‘Yes,’ said the Vicar wonderingly, looking towards Mr Walter, who had resumed his chair at his office-table, and who at once saw something out of window which attracted his attention.

‘That is well,’ said the brisk Mr Henry, who had grown very bald these years, but who was as sharp in manner as ever—‘that is well; for this chat of ours to-day is not exactly—indeed, I think I may say, Mr Walter’—appealing to his brother—‘can scarcely come under the category of business at all—eh?’

‘No—not—not exactly,’ said Mr Walter, who was arranging the neat piles of documents and papers, in all stages of dusty age, on his table.

‘No; doubtless you noticed that—my dear Vicar—from my letter.’

John shook his head.

‘It was, as usual, mystifying,’ he said, with a tinge of sarcasm.

‘Oh, my dear sir, we must not say “mystifying,” we must not indeed!’ said the little man, with a short laugh, cross-

ing and uncrossing his legs. ‘We lawyers never mystify. It is you clients who persist in being mystified. The affairs we take in hand are as clear as daylight. If you clients cannot see in the daylight, that is not our fault. However, hold to your bad opinion of us by all means. It does not harm us, and amuses you. But I wish that you thought as well of us, for instance, as the old gentleman who has just left us, with a heavy cheque, drawn in his favour by the firm, in his pocket-book. I daresay you recognised him. No? Not the celebrated undertaker, Gillfly? He has just buried a very old and valued client of ours in the good, honest, old-fashioned way,—no foolery of flowers and gewgaws,—Professor Blackett,’ went on Mr Everest loudly and slowly, gazing up at the ceil-

ing as if he were deciphering the name there. ‘Yes; Professor Blackett.’

‘Ah, I was so sorry to hear of his death!’ said the Vicar, the memory of the dead professor’s interest in his condemned book rousing him. ‘He was a learned man — ay, a very great man. Was he really a client of yours?’

‘He was,’ said Mr Henry Everest, coughing slightly, and then rubbing his eyeglass softly and slowly with his bandana handkerchief. ‘And he did us the honour to repose the greatest confidence in us. My brother and I attended his funeral, being, with the exception of his medical adviser, the only mourners. His wish was that it should be so.’

‘Surely he had relatives—friends?’

‘He was quite a recluse—quite a recluse,’ said the little lawyer, pursing up

his lips—‘a philosopher, a peculiar man. I should say now—if it be not irreverent—that one might paraphrase a certain Scriptural sentence, and say of the professor, his books were his mother, his father, and his brethren. He had a unique library—unique.’

‘So I have heard,’ said the Vicar wondering if there would be a sale, and if so, if he could, by hook or by crook manage to buy one or two books he knew were in the collection—books which would be everything to him. ‘I suppose—considering his public spirit—that he has left his collection to his college?’

‘No,’ said Mr Henry, settling his collar. ‘No. I cannot say that he has. His will was a simple one, and will create a certain surprise. He has left

everything, money, houses—he had invested in house-property, —library, unpublished manuscripts, all—to one person.’

‘A great, a very great proof of his belief in that one person,’ said the Vicar, slightly disappointed that the chance of the sale was gone. ‘He must indeed have been deeply attached to—to—the person, and have had unlimited confidence in him, or perhaps—her.’

The last suggestion was an afterthought. The gaunt, grey-haired professor, as the Vicar remembered him, was scarcely one to charm the fair sex, or to care whether he charmed or not.

‘I agree with you,’ said Mr Henry energetically. ‘To my mind, the professor has done a very noble thing. He has lived frugally, has saved and amassed for the sake of this person whom he has

made his heir. But I am forgetting'— he rang the bell—' I ordered a bottle of some particular dry sherry to be opened for you, to refresh you after your journey.'

The Vicar disclaimed needing any such stimulant. He was just beginning to wonder what this new aspect of the Messrs Everest meant, and an uneasy dread of he knew not what had come to him as a sudden chill, when a neat maid-servant entered with a tray, decanters, glasses, sandwiches, plates. The quickness suggested that she might have been waiting her summons in an ante-room, which was the fact.

John Black stood up. He was getting thoroughly uncomfortable. He wanted neither their wine nor their sandwiches, nor their new friendliness. One word of truth, one word of kindness, years

ago, would have altered his life. Now they might do as they pleased. It was too late.

‘Come, my dear sir,’ said the little man, pouring out three glasses of sherry, and taking up his glass with a festive air, as if he were at a wedding or a christening—‘come ! I am sure you will not refuse, as you seem interested in the late lamented professor’s affairs, to drink the health of his heir, lucky man !’

The Vicar shook his head.

‘I am not a man who cares for these customs,’ he said. ‘Custom has been set aside so entirely in my life that you can scarcely be surprised.’

Mr Walter, who had been very fidgety during the conversation, looked at his brother, who remained perfectly unem-

barrassed, and who went on, while he almost forced a glass of wine upon John Black,—

‘Then I will propose a toast you can scarcely refuse to drink, my friend. Long life to your sons and daughter, and may you also live to enjoy their happiness!’

It was a neatly managed little speech. But like other innocent-seeming things, it brought about a convulsion—it led to the overturning and resettling of a life.

John Black grew deadly pale. The wine-glass fell from his hand, the glass shivered into glistening powder on the faded hearthrug.

‘Stop!’ he said, in a low, desperate voice. ‘I know now what your business with me is. I know! I see it in your faces! Don’t speak,’ he went on fiercely; ‘I will not hear you! You have

brought me here to offer me money, to tempt me with books—to forgive the accursed man who has damned me with disgrace. Now I see! Now I understand why he dare not look me in the face. Devil!’ he cried, throwing up his arms as he seemed to see the gaunt, white-haired man as he had seen him once, hurrying through his friend’s rooms. ‘It is well for you that you are dead! It is well for you that you are dead!’

Here he dropped heavily into a chair. All grew dark before his eyes. But Mr Walter Everest, who, outside his office, was the worn and meek father of a dozen obstreperous children, forgot he was within the legal precincts, and tended the Vicar quite fraternally till he had slightly recovered.

‘My dear Mr Blackett—for there is no need of further ceremony, since you have arrived at the truth so cleverly—you really must not allow yourself to be overcome like this—you really must not,’ said Mr Henry, who was hovering uneasily about this uncomfortable client who transgressed all rule and precedent. ‘You are too emotional—indeed, far too emotional. Do consider. Be reasonable. Your respected father was in a singular position. No one knew of his marriage, and your mother, to whom he was much attached, lived but a few minutes after your birth. All was strictly lawful and regular.’

The Vicar was leaning back. His face was of an ashen tint. His cold deathlike hands lay one on each knee.

‘Proofs,’ he said, turning his languid eyes towards Mr Henry—‘proofs!’

‘Certainly, certainly,’ said Mr Henry reassuringly, while Mr Walter’s long legs made one stride to his table, and with one movement of his long arm clutched a packet of papers. ‘You shall see them, all in order, in the most satisfactory manner.’

Here Mr Walter seated himself by the Vicar, and sympathetically explained.

‘This,’ he said, unfolding a sheet of letter-paper, ‘is the document wherein John Blackett and Margaret Baird established their marriage according to the law of Scotland.’

The Vicar took the paper. His awakened filial feeling for an unknown mother, who had paid for his earthly existence with her own, was urging him at least to protect her memory. He scornfully turned his eyes from the masculine declaration

heading the sheet, to fix them upon the uncertain feminine handwriting below—Margaret Baird's declaration. It was almost a horrible minute—that minute when John Blackett gazed at the faint, faded writing which had been traced by the hand of his mother. The closest tie united him to the being who had penned those words ; yet, until to-day, he had not even known her name.

‘ This is the certificate of the English marriage.’

The Vicar saw that on a certain date, very shortly after the Scottish marriage, John Blackett and Margaret Baird were married by licence at a certain church in a London suburb. Then he glanced at the certificate of his baptism two years later, and that of his mother's death. But he refused to look at the certificates

connected with his father, the late professor.

‘I will have nothing to do with him or his legacy,’ he said. ‘My one effort will be to forget that he ever existed. But these,’ he said, looking towards Mr Walter with so sad a smile, that the lawyer, hopelessly off duty, felt a lump gather in his throat—‘these, if you please, I will keep and bequeath to my children as my most precious possession.’

He folded the legal proofs of his mother’s wifeness with a reverent touch. Meanwhile, Mr Walter suggested, in an undertone to his brother, the advisability of summoning a doctor. He did not like the Vicar’s death-like appearance.

‘We must ask him first,’ was Mr Henry’s cautious whisper, looking at their client as if he were a torpedo, and might

suddenly explode and scatter that quiet legal dwelling to the four winds. Then he gingerly suggested—did Mr Blackett feel a little better? He must remember that it was not so very long since his convalescence. Now there was a sharp young practitioner just round the corner, a friend of theirs, who would come in and prescribe with the greatest pleasure in life.

‘A client of yours?’ said the Vicar, with a scornful glance. ‘Thanks, Mr Everest’—heavily staggering to his feet—‘but—but I have had experience with one client of yours which does not encourage me to have anything to do with the others.’

John Black, or legally speaking, Blackett, was struggling to be himself; but his breath left him as he spoke, and he clutched at the mantelpiece.

Mr Walter suggested that he would

himself take the Vicar to his own home to be nursed by his wife, and that Miss Blackett should be sent for, then matters might be discussed quietly in a few days. But the uncomfortable client was an obstinate man. He negatived all suggestions.

Still the brothers Everest were determined not to trust him. Once, long ago, a man had gone from their office and had poisoned himself at his chambers.

When it came in their way now to make private disclosures of a startling kind to a client, they looked after him, and did not let him go scot-free. So they suggested that some friend should be sent for.

‘I have none,’ grimly said John. ‘At least none in your fine city—except Messrs Cotton & Woolstone, of course. I am sure’—sarcastically—‘they would leave

business of the most pressing character to attend upon me.'

Then there was a discussion. John Blackett insisted upon departing, and they almost barred his way.

At last there was a compromise. Mr Walter Everest would accompany him and leave him in safety—somewhere—but would only leave him with safety guaranteed.

So they two departed in a hansom to seek out an old college friend of the Vicar's who had chambers in the Temple. They alighted; and while Mr Walter made inquiries here and there about the tall, quiet buildings, the Vicar sat on one of the benches near the fountain. Children were playing in a subdued fashion, lest they should be turned out by the awful 'gentleman in uniform' who came saunter-

ing about. The feathery spray glittered in the sunlight. The Thames rippled a few hundred yards away. Picturesque barges moved slowly by. Then came a puffing steamer. A dog came up to the Vicar, and, putting his head on his knee, looked up wistfully in his face. Such a look, he sadly thought, might have been given to the dead professor in time gone by—by his mother—the unacknowledged wife. On parting, Mr Henry Everest had placed in his hands a few private letters, which, he said, would explain the situation. He touched them as they lay in the lettercase in his breast-pocket—he longed, yet dreaded to see them.

Then back came Mr Walter, unsuccessful. He had found the friend's chambers, but he was still out of town, and not expected to return for weeks.

‘You must really come home with me ; there is nothing else I can suggest, unless you will allow me to accompany you to Crowsfoot.’

But this the new legatee would not hear of. What was to be done? In his dilemma, John Black thought of Hal Romaine, and, following the thought of Hal, came the overwhelming recollection that, if he accepted his father’s legacy and the situation altogether, Griselda could no longer be Hal’s inferior in the eyes of the world.

He thrust the idea away, as a temptation. But he mentioned Hal to Mr Everest.

‘The very thing,’ said that gentleman ‘We are no distance from Pall Mall. If he is a young man about town, he will scarcely have tubbed or breakfasted yet.’

They drove to Pall Mall. Mr Henry Romaine occupied a first floor. He was at home, his 'man' informed Mr Everest, who went down and fetched the Vicar, greatly relieved in his mind.

'That was a nasty bit of business,' thought the lawyer, as he returned in the hansom to tell his brother he had left their eccentric client with one of the 'most genial young fellows' he had ever met—'a remarkably crooked and awkward bit of business! But Henry was quite up to the mark; he always is.' The lanky Walter had a fatuous admiration for his sharper brother. 'The man has such a queer, exceptional character. Great ability—sound moral foundation, certainly, but no common sense! No worldly wisdom! Henry said that. He has always thought less of John Black—Blackett, since he

took that one "No" of ours, and made no effort to find out his real status. Of course he could have done so, if he had gone about it in the right way !'

He remembered well how irritated his brother had been with the young man whose peculiar father had determined not to acknowledge him as his son, since the day when he was born, and the young wife, whose existence no one suspected, died. In those days neither the professor nor his son was a straightforward, satisfactory client. Both were outside ordinary calculation. Mr Henry Everest had formed a pretty correct estimate when he said to his brother,—

'The professor thought his private marriage justifiable, because, as a married man, he must lose his fellowships and cripple his income. He thought his re-

pudiation—for that is the correct term—of his legitimate son justifiable for the same reason. I daresay he feels he is right. But the plain fact is, that he is wrapt up in himself till all natural feeling is dead. His passion for Margaret Baird was utterly selfish, and, speaking as man to man, his treatment of his son amounts to a moral crime.’

Henry Everest had tried his best to induce the professor at least to adopt the child, or to see him from time to time. But Professor Blackett meant to return to his old life, and to keep the memory of Margaret Baird, his sweet Scotch lassie, buried in the ossified organ he called his heart. The blooming blue-eyed young creature had awakened that heart to life and love; but with her the life and love died too. And he feared to have those feelings

reawakened by her child, the child he had refused to look at and intended never to see.

He had provided for John. He had inquired now and then as to his welfare and progress. When he read the crushing condemnations of his son's book, he was angry—angry with the critics for their excessive severity, angry with John for embarking upon troubled waters among dangerous mental shoals; angry with the Everests because he had not been told beforehand; and, although he did not know it, angry with himself when he saw that his son had inherited his power of thought, and that, if he had been under his own guidance, that power might have developed and shone upon the world quite differently.

At first he went to the Everests to say,

‘No more money from me,’ to stop John’s controversial tendency in the most effectual way. But then he read John’s book, and was so possessed with admiration, longing, regret, remorse, that his troubled, obstinate mind wore upon his feeble body, and his end was hastened.

It was true that he had saved from his income, rigidly. The Vicar was heir to a capital which, safely invested, would bring him an income of between two and three thousand pounds yearly. Then there were houses in Cambridge, and, above all, that choice library of books and valuable manuscripts.

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Hal Romaine was astonished, overwhelmed, when Chancell, his valet, announced that the Reverend Mr Black was below, and wished to see him. Wild

hopes — vague imaginations — Griselda sending for him—the Vicar on their side —Sir Hubert and his mother relenting —made his blood course at fever-speed. His shout, ‘Bring him up at once!’ astonished Chancell, who had of late seen his young master gloomy, or savage, or irritable. He was just out of his bath; he rubbed and scrubbed and hustled on his clothing, brushed his damp curly hair, and came rushing through the folding-doors into his sitting-room all glowing, bright, animated.

His eager inquiry, ‘All right at home?’ answered, he invited both lawyer and client to breakfast; and, before he gave them time to say nay, he sent Chancell flying to order everything, anything — whatever could be had and as soon as possible, and particularly some of those

pints of champagne, 'you know—those the Marquis d'Estrées sent me, Chancell!' Little wonder that homely Walter Everest, although declining his hospitality, thought Hal Romaine one of the most genial young fellows he had ever met, and left him feeling safe that the Vicar was in the best possible hands. Hal, too, was going to Feather's Court that very night by the 6.20 train.

Poor, short-sighted human nature! Poor Walter Everest! Before that day would be dead for ever—what was he not destined to suffer at being the innocent cause of his client's intent to journey by that fated train!

As soon as Walter Everest left those two—Griselda's father and Griselda's lover—alone, Hal was struck by the Vicar's pallor. Was he ill, or merely disturbed, worried? All the young

man's innate tenderness sprang up. This was the father of his betrothed wife, his cherished love. He had come to him—to him—in his trouble. It must be a trouble! Hal gently insisted upon the Vicar's resting in a large easy-chair.

He drew another chair close, and talked, agreeably, as he knew how. The Vicar gradually re-animated, as far as he could, after that ugly shock.

Hal's room was a change of scene indeed!

‘I should scarcely have guessed this to be a bachelor's chamber,’ said John Black, presently looking round with a faint smile. ‘It is more like a fine lady's boudoir. Ah, Hal, it is well that you are your father's heir! You would miss the purple and the fine linen, my boy.’

‘A fit of effeminacy!’ said John Black bitterly. ‘Hal, it is not your fault that you lack in manliness, that you are fitful as a passionate woman. But, if you were but a bit stronger—rude and rough, if you please, but with the promise of a man in you—I could give you Griselda with some hope that you two would be happy. I would make sacrifices even which would secure your parents’ consent.’

Hal saw his advantage and seized it. At this juncture Chancell and a maid-servant brought in the two-o’clock ‘breakfast.’ So, while the Vicar was reluctantly partaking of the delicacies provided for him, there was no further conversation on the subject of a nearer and stronger tie between host and guest. After Hal had insisted on John Black’s

making somewhat of a meal, their talk was resumed. The Vicar gradually succumbed to his young friend's indefinable charm. While he was coaxed into concessions, he knew he was being coaxed; but he admired the handsome, winning young fellow the more for that very fact. Certainly Hal Romaine had not the qualities he would wish to see in Griselda's husband. He was erratic, passionate, capricious; but he was generous, loving, and thoughtful when he chose to be thoughtful. And, last, but most important—so important as to fairly outweigh all other considerations—Griselda loved him.

While Chancell packed his master's portmanteaux in the adjoining room, the Vicar and Hal still talked 'Griselda' over their coffee.

A soft mellow autumn haze was settling about St James's Park as they started for the station in Hal's tilbury, Chancell and the luggage following in a cab. The Vicar's morning storm was succeeded by a calm. He felt peaceful. He was at rest, as it were, he told himself. The time had not yet come for him to act. He enjoyed the old city, so beautiful in her evening garb of subdued lights, murmurs, subsiding activity, and over all the glitter of tiny fires, the lamps. The tide of life was ebbing under the quiet starry sky.

Even London had her hour of peace, thought John Black. Perhaps his halting-place in life was reached; there would be no more turmoil for him!

Of course, if he chose to accept the position of Professor Blackett's post-

humously-acknowledged son and heir, all or most of his difficulties would be over; and Griselda and the boys—

He shrank from active thought.

‘To-morrow, to-morrow!’ he said to himself.

And he said the same to Hal Romaine, who broke the silence by some leading question meant to probe the Vicar’s intentions with regard to his and Griselda’s affairs.

‘To - morrow, my boy!’ he said. ‘There is plenty of time. You have your life before you.’

‘What if I had not?’ said Hal, half in jest, half in earnest. ‘Do you know, when I am shutting my eyes at night, I often think I may not awake—of late particularly?’

‘Since you have been more reckless?’

If you had really thought seriously, it would have been a bad moment, Hal.'

Hal shook his head.

'There is such a thing as being desperate,' he said. 'You may talk to one then of death and hell or heaven, but they are mere words. They run through the mind like water runs down one's throat in fever, with as little effect. I have often felt that, if I must live in the humour I have been in lately—feeling no pleasure, only sick of life—I would rather die.'

'But we have not the choice,' said John Black gravely. 'In a moment a wave of Eternity rushes upon us and sweeps us away—all chances of doing good, of helping others, of executing our tiny atom of the great mosaic, past recall.'

‘And those who wish to go are left high and dry upon the shore,’ said Hal. ‘Say what you will, it is an awful puzzle.’

Here they drove up to the station. The 6.20 train, which had travelled safely to its destination day by day for so many years, quietly dropping its living freight at intervals along the way, was drawn up at the platform. The ticket-collectors were busily clipping the tickets of the crowd that was hurrying past the open gates, each one eagerly rushing to his or her doom. It was such an every-day affair, this going home or down the line by the 6.20, that the idea that so steady and sober a means of locomotion—not only steady, but so well-tried—would come to grief on that particular day occurred to none,

to no passenger, to no official. No warning ghost, no bad omen, no difficulty, no 'coincidence' gave a saving hint. Those careless chatty passengers,—one calling out for an evening paper, another 'chaffing' a guard, a third looking for an own particular corner, others—regular passengers—seeking the 'set' they liked to travel with,—were presently to be shot out of life into eternity as suddenly and unceremoniously as if they were a load of sand.

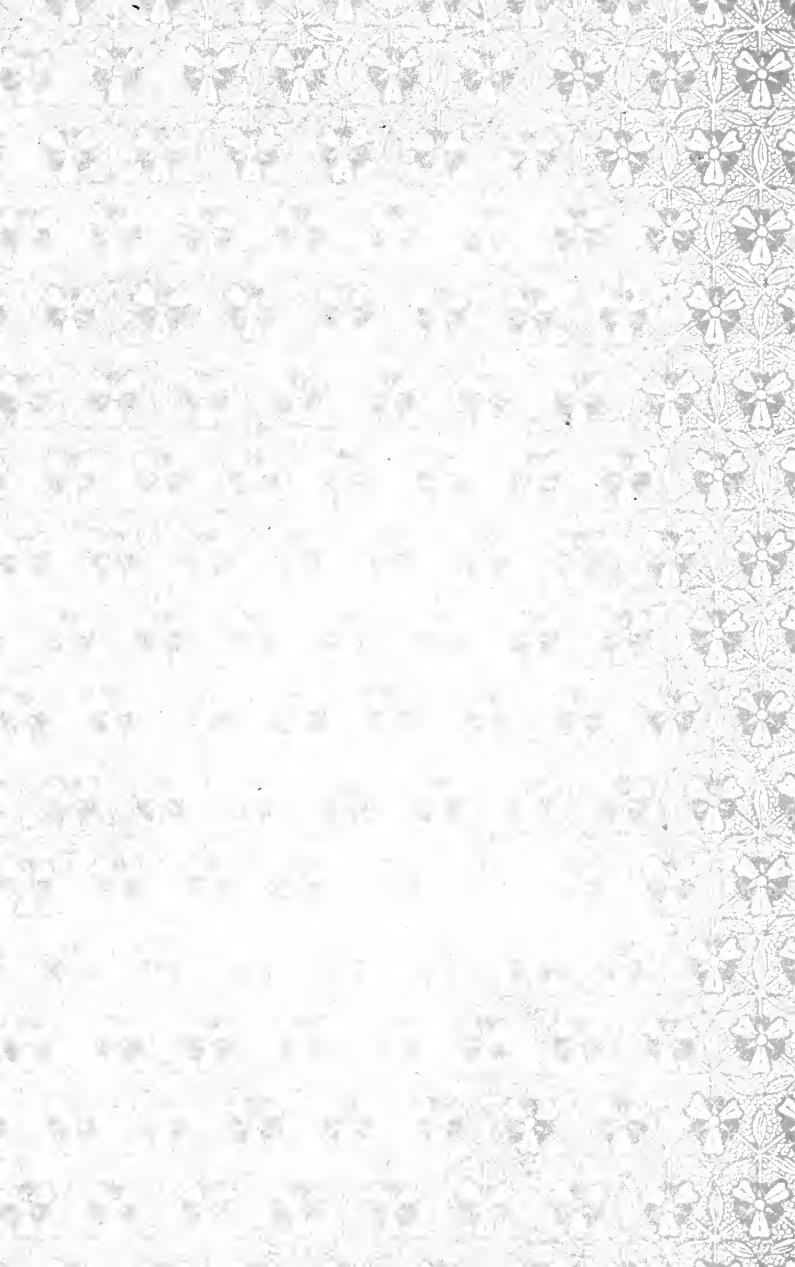
There were two minutes only before the train started. Chancell was having Hal's luggage labelled. Hal rushed off to the ticket-office. The Vicar compared his watch with the illuminated station-clock. His watch was a few minutes slow.

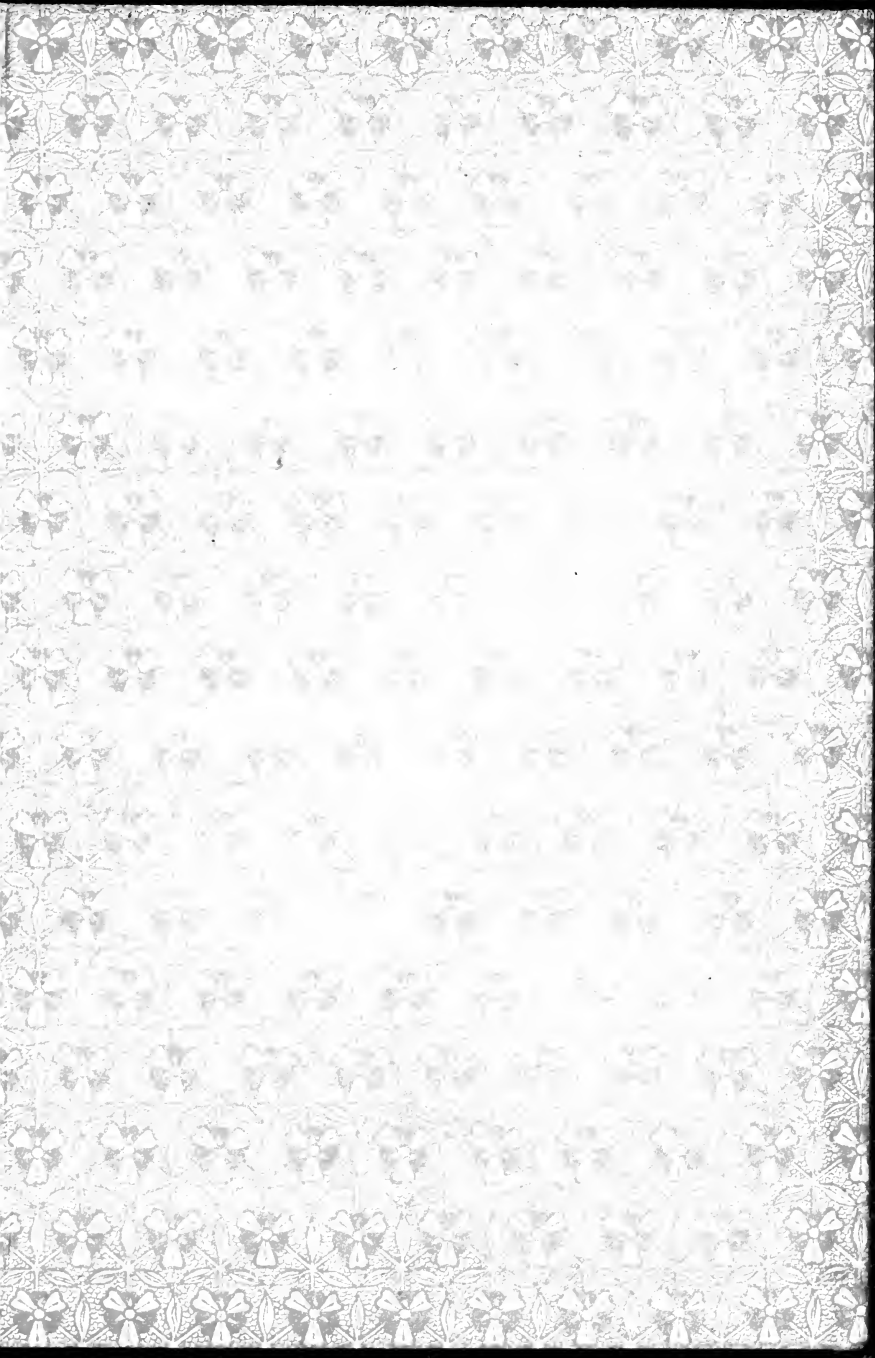
The guard was impatiently pacing the

platform. The men were about to shut the gates. 'Time's up, sir,' shouted one.

Hal Romaine came running up. He and the Vicar hurried. They got into a first-class smoking compartment, they and the others to whom those carriages would be the instruments of death. Then the guard shut the door, and—locked it.

END OF VOL. II.





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